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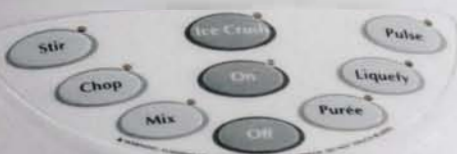
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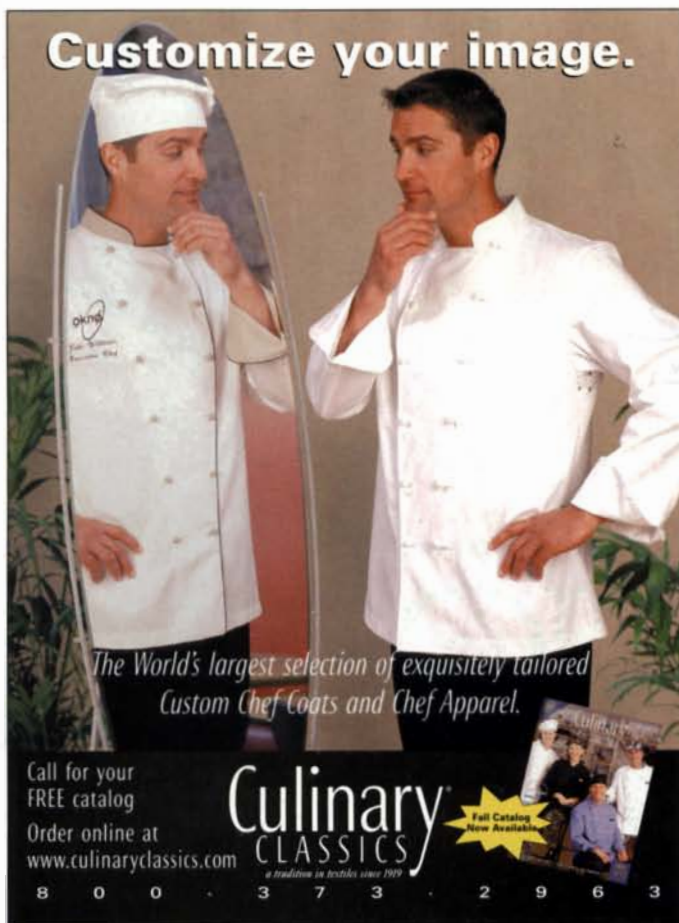
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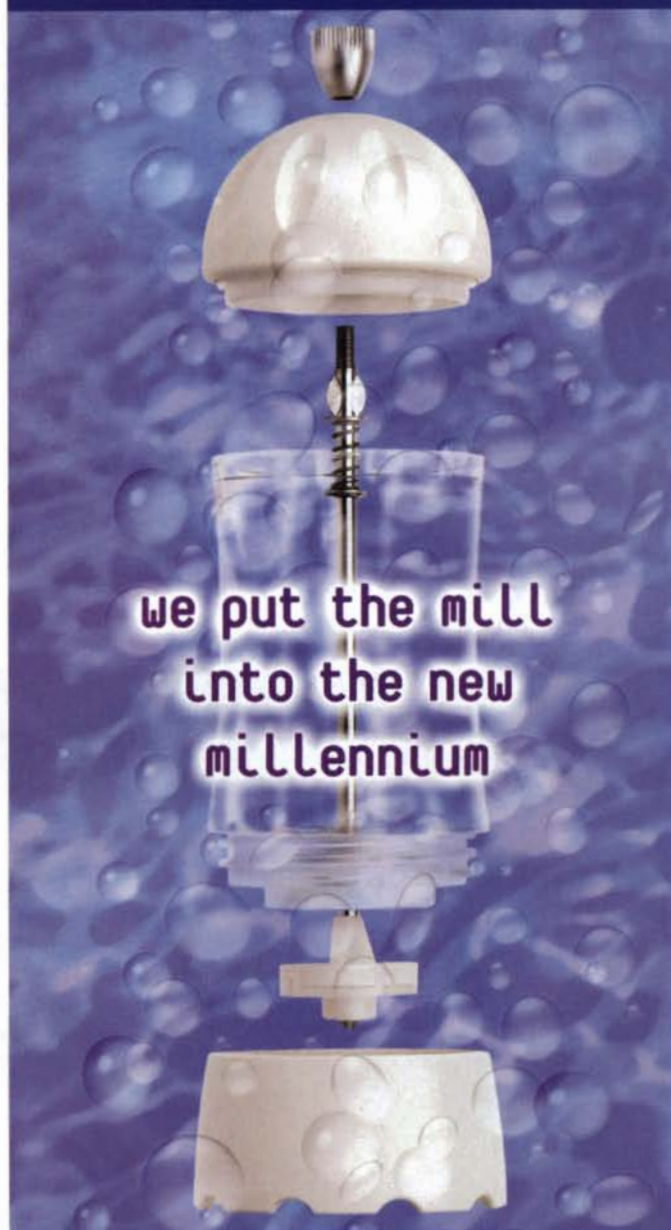
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DECEMBER/JANUARY 2000 ISSUE 36



**60** Master flaky, buttery croissants with champion baker Robert Jörin's award-winning techniques.

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a new way for moist  
meat and golden, crisp skin.

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**On the cover:** *Toasted Hazelnut & Chocolate Marquise*, p. 66.

Cover photos, Scott Phillips.

These pages: bottom left, Daniel Proctor; all others, Scott Phillips.

**76 Learn the secret to creamy fudge and chewy taffy—controlling the size of the sugar crystals.**



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His students may jokingly call him “The Laminator,” but **Robert Jörin** (“Croissants,” p. 60) is serious when it comes to

butter-enriched doughs and other pastries. Robert’s focus and dedication won him and the American team first place in 1999 in international competition at the Coupe du Monde de la Boulangerie in Paris. Robert teaches baking at the Culinary Institute of America’s Greystone campus in the Napa Valley. Before that, he owned the Upscale Downtown Bakery in Petaluma, California, where he lives.

Sue Ann Scheppers Wercinski assisted Robert in writing this story. She has written and edited books on chemistry and lab equipment and is a graduate of the Baking and Pastry Program at the Culinary Institute of America, where her science background came in handy. Sue Ann is an instructor at HomeChef, a cooking school and cookware store in San Francisco, where she lives.

As a graduate of Madeline Kamman’s School for American Chefs and with a Masters in art history, **Gwen Kvavli Gulliksen** (“Stuffed Roasts,” p. 28) merges her training, talents, and passions working as executive chef at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles for Bon Appétit Management Company. She gets her inspiration for her menus by visiting the Santa Monica farmers’ market. Before working at the Getty, Gwen was the executive chef at the Robert Mondavi Food & Wine Center in Costa Mesa, California. She lives in Los Angeles.



**Joe Verde** (“Chicken Under a Brick,” p. 33) left a career in military intelligence to become a chef. He graduated from the French Culinary Institute and

went on to work for the best chefs in New York, including Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Daniel Boulud. Verde took his first executive chef position at the Hilton at Short Hills, New Jersey, and later was asked to be the executive chef at Oscar’s at the

Waldorf-Astoria in New York, where he completely revamped and updated the menu. He just accepted another new challenge: executive chef at the Millennium Hilton in New York.

**Martha Holmberg** (“Potato Gratin,” p. 36) is the editor of *Fine Cooking*. She got a lot of practice making gratins when she worked as a private chef and caterer in Paris after attending La Varenne cooking school.

As chef and co-owner of the Inn at Twin Linden in Narvon, Pennsylvania, **Donna Leahy** (“Stuffed French Toast,” p. 38) manages every aspect of the inn’s food. Her husband and partner, Bob, shares in the rest of the chores. Trained as a television and video producer, Donna is a self-taught cook who has twice been a featured chef at the James Beard House in Manhattan. She is the author of *Morning Glories* (Rizzoli) and the forthcoming *Afternoon Delights: Elegant Teas & Soothing Coffee Breaks*.

**Kay Fahey** (“Old-Fashioned Candies,” p. 41) learned to turn out good food quickly when the cook walked off the line of her family’s restaurant. These days, Kay specializes in writing about southern food for magazines like *Oklahoma Home & Lifestyle*, *Nevada*, and *Fine Cooking*.

**Richard Donnelly** (“Hot Chocolate,” p. 46) had his first chocolate “experience” while studying cooking at La Varenne in France. From that moment on, he knew he would devote himself to the craft of chocolate. In 1988, Richard set up shop in Santa Cruz, California. Donnelly Fine Chocolates is founded on the European chocolatier tradition but has American influences as well.

**Joanne McAllister Smart** (“Citrus Juicers,” p. 49) is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*. After putting the juicers through their paces, she has a freezerful of juice—lemon curd, anyone?

**Lidia Matticchio Bastianich** (“Matching Pasta & Sauce,” p. 52) has many roles: chef, restaurant owner, author, and television series host.

Her restaurant Felidia has long been regarded as one of the country’s best Italian restaurants, and Lidia herself recently won the James Beard Award for best New York City chef. Her latest book is *Lidia’s Italian Table* (William Morrow), a companion to her national public television series of the same name.

**Paul Bertolli** (“Balsamic Vinegar,” p. 56) is a contributing editor for *Fine Cooking* and the chef and co-owner of Oliveto restaurant in Oakland, California. Paul is also an importer and distributor of balsamic vinegar barrels, and he provides consultation and management services for people who want to make their own balsamic vinegar.



**Abigail Johnson Dodge** (“Marquise,” p. 66) is *Fine Cooking*’s test kitchen director. Abby is the author of *Great Fruit Desserts* (Rizzoli), and she’s working on her second cookbook, *Williams-Sonoma Cooking for Kids*, due out next fall.



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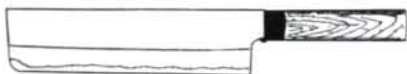


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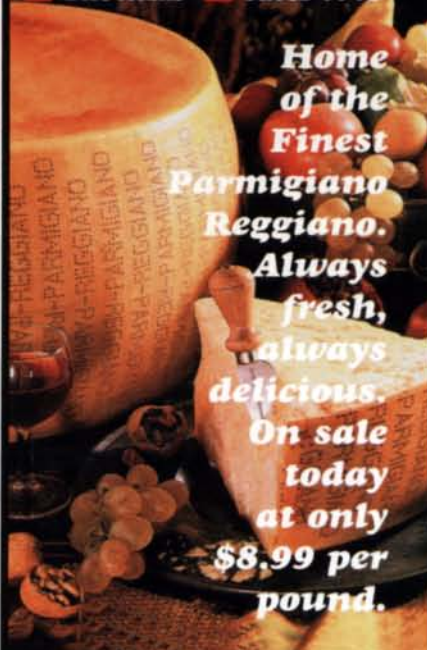


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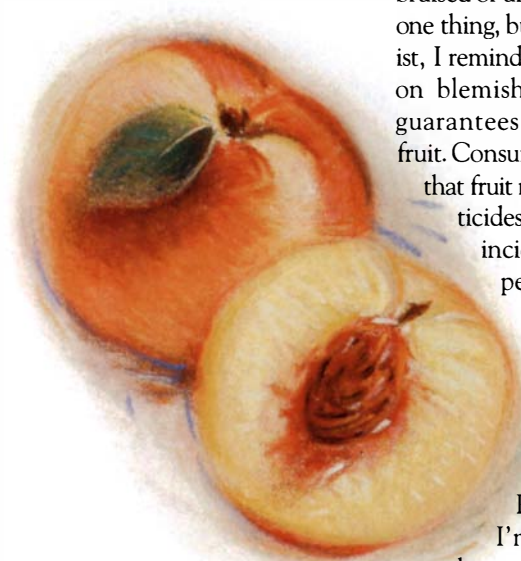
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Here's the place to share your thoughts on our recent articles or your food and cooking philosophies. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to [fc@taunton.com](mailto:fc@taunton.com).



## One fruit's blemish is another's charm

I have some thoughts on your piece about stone fruit desserts by Abigail Johnson Dodge in *Fine Cooking* #34. Great article, yummy ideas, but I feel obliged to remind you and your readers that Ms. Dodge's buying technique reinforces farmers' use of pesticides. The visual "once-over" she recommends is fine except that she rejects blemished fruit. Rejecting bruised or unevenly ripe fruit is one thing, but as a horticulturist, I remind you that insisting on blemish-free fruit often guarantees buying sprayed fruit. Consumers need to know

that fruit raised without pesticides can have a higher incidence of visual imperfections, caused by insects or plant diseases no longer on the plant, that usually have no impact on taste. Please understand I'm not talking about wormy fruit. It's just that visually perfect fruit is often not possible or necessary, unless you want to eat small amounts of pesticides and pesticide byproducts.

Perhaps you could have an organic grower write an article on the tradeoffs I'm discussing. It could give pointers on choosing organic fruit and vegetables, accompanied by appropriate photos of unimportant blemishes, etc.

—Jonathan L. Bruschi,  
Lynn, MA

**Abby Dodge replies:** Thanks for pointing out an important distinction between a cosmetic blemish, which in most cases won't even show in a fin-

ished dish, and what I meant by blemish—a gash, a bruise, or a spoiled spot that indicates damage to the fruit's interior. I definitely prefer to use organic produce as long as the overall quality is high.

## Patting our own backs

We're very pleased to announce that *Fine Cooking* received first prize for Best Food Coverage in a Magazine from the Association of Food Journalists in its 1999 contest. One judge called the magazine "an excellent example of what writing about food should be for people who enjoy cooking." We hope our readers agree.

## A searchable, cumulative index, at last

Starting with this issue, the year-end index is being replaced with a searchable index on our web site that covers all six years of publication. As a quick reference, however, we're printing a one-page index that lists all the recipes published in 1999, issues 31–36 (see p. 89).

To use the web site index, go to [www.finecooking.com](http://www.finecooking.com), click on Magazine Index, and then type in a key word, such as *roux* or *chicken*, and you'll get a list of entries. When you click on the one you want, you'll see the issue and page where the article or recipe appeared in the magazine.

For those of you who don't care to use the Internet, a printed version of the 1999 year-end index will be available at no charge through our customer service department. Just call 800/888-8286.

## Taking it to a higher level

In Letters, *Fine Cooking* #33, Letty Platt replied to a request

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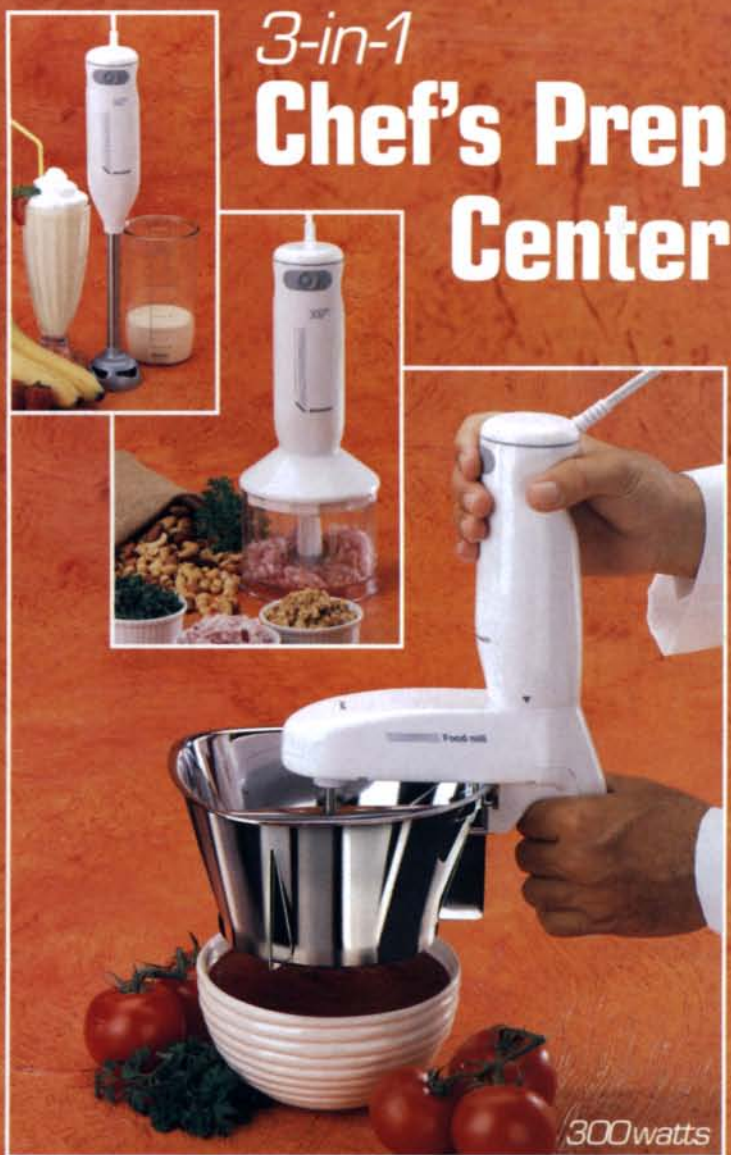
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# Bravetti

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# LETTERS

for help on high-altitude baking. Ms. Flatt's suggestions are on the mark but lack some specificity. The following sources might give cooks a bit more detail about exactly what adjustments to make to leaveners, fluids, flour, etc.

I lived in La Paz, Bolivia, at 12,400 feet (yes, more than twice as high as Denver), where cooking anything was a challenge. Water boiled at about 188°F, so even boiling dryspaghetti was tough: by the time the center was something less than crunchy, the outside was gummy—*blechh*. The high-altitude directions and tips in *Joy of Cooking* were outstanding, from baking to roasting to candymaking. They provide formulas, such as for every 500 feet above sea level, reduce the temperature to which you cook your candy by 1 degree. The first time I tried the variations for a favorite cake, I thought it would never work, looking at the resulting batter—it looked like thin soup. But the cake turned out perfectly. *Betty Crocker's Sky-High Baking* was also very useful. The U.S. Embassy, for which we worked in La Paz, sent out a newsletter including tips from this book.

I'm now happily living at sea level and not adjusting recipes any longer...at least not because of altitude!

—Sarah Smith, via e-mail

## Rx for crusty bread: a steam bath, followed by a sauna

Your article on getting a good crust on rustic breads was great (*Fine Cooking* #30). I use the water-in-a-hot-cast-iron-pan trick to introduce a moist heat when the loaf first goes into the oven. A local artisan baker (Fieldstone Artisan Breads, in Crescent Beach, British Columbia) told me that dry heat is equally important in the last half of baking. This basically toasts the crust, making it firmer, chewier, and more attractive because it doesn't collapse at all as it cools. I usually add water to the pan when the bread goes in, take out the pan 4 minutes into baking, open the oven door a few inches at 10 minutes, and then leave it open until the bread is done (about 20 minutes total, at 450°F).

Love your magazine.

—Nigel Aspinall,  
Surry, British Columbia

## Not for adults only

Every year when our family gets together, the kids cook a special meal for the adults, complete with invitations and a menu; the little kids dress up as waiters. We always try to be original and creative so we were delighted to find so many interesting recipes in your magazine. Since we are hardly

gourmet cooks, we appreciated the clear layout of the instructions, the helpful tips, and the colorful photos. This helped us to easily provide a wonderful meal for our parents. They especially enjoyed the blueberry shortcake that we served for dessert (*Fine Cooking* #28). The Mediterranean carrot salad (#32) was also a big hit, and we will be sure to make the rosemary flat-

bread again (#16). Thanks again for helping us to put on a great evening!

—The Lovely & Soskice family,  
British Columbia, Canada,  
and Cambridge, England

## Photo credit

The photos in *Artisan Foods*, "Flatbread Baked with Soul," on the back cover of *Fine Cooking* #35 were taken by Judi Rutz. ♦

## Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat to the temperature in the recipe; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few minutes before the suggested time in the recipe. For meat and poultry, use an instant-read thermometer.

In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not many home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them—see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 68, and #17, p. 62).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

Unless otherwise noted, assume that

- ♦ Butter is unsalted.
- ♦ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ♦ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ♦ Sugar is granulated.
- ♦ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.
- ♦ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.

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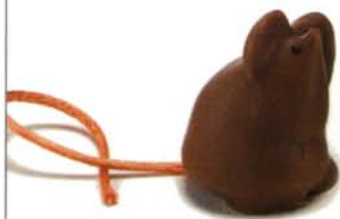
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READER SERVICE NO. 57



Have a question of general interest about cooking?

Send it to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or via e-mail to [fc@taunton.com](mailto:fc@taunton.com), and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

### Meatless or not, mincemeat is rich food

*What is mincemeat?*

—Raven Dunn,  
Aurora, CO

Susan Vanderbeek replies: Mincemeat is a rich, spicy mixture of finely chopped dried fruit, nuts, spices, brandy or rum, beef suet (the rich white fat surrounding beef kidneys), and cooked lean meat, such as beef, lamb, or pork. For early Americans, mincemeat was one method of preserving valuable meat through the long winter months. Today's mincemeat recipes tend to omit the cooked meat (and sometimes the suet), though my family's traditional version includes it. We stew the meat (we use venison)



on the bone with cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, and mace until the meat is very tender. Then we pull off the meat, chop it fine, and cook it again with chopped apples, orange zest and juice, cider, grape juice, citron, raisins, currants, suet, molasses, brown sugar, lemon juice, and sometimes brandy. We let the mincemeat age for at least six months so the flavors meld and mellow, and then we use it in pies and filled cookies throughout the holiday season.

*Susan Vanderbeek lives on her grandfather's farm on Whidbey*

*Island near Seattle. She is the chef-owner of The Oystercatcher restaurant, also on Whidbey Island.*

### How to produce a jellied chicken stock

*I like it when my chicken stock gets gelatinous but I can't make this happen every time. How can I consistently produce a rich, jellied stock?*

—Kay Ackerman, via e-mail

James Peterson replies: Gelatinous chicken stock is preferable, though not essential, for many dishes. A jellied stock produces more body and a richer mouth feel in soups and especially in sauces that have been reduced. Gelatin in itself has no savor, but its presence means you've extracted the most flavor from the bones and other ingredients you've used to make the stock.

Gelatin is a protein that comes from collagen—another protein found in bones and connective tissue. The backs and neck bones of chicken have more collagen than other parts, so by throwing in a few extra backs and necks you'll get a more gelatinous stock. Some stock recipes call for just these parts.

Also, use a minimum of liquid so you don't dilute the gelatin. Break up chicken carcasses so the bones settle tightly in the pot. Add just enough liquid to barely cover—the chicken will shrink and settle as the liquid simmers—and cook uncovered for at least three hours. You shouldn't need more than two cups of water per pound of chicken, even less if you've roasted the carcasses first. Browning the

bones in the oven shrinks them, so they'll fit more snugly in the stockpot and need less water to cover. If you find that the stock still doesn't gel when you refrigerate it, next time let it simmer uncovered longer so it reduces and concentrates the gelatin.

James Peterson, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, is the author of several award-winning books, including *Sauces, Vegetables, and Fish & Shellfish*. His latest book is *Essentials of Cooking (Artisan)*.

### Baking level cakes

*How can I bake a level cake rather than one with a mounded top?*

—Winnie West,  
New Orleans, LA

Rose Levy Beranbaum replies: There are a number of reasons why a cake might have a domed surface, but the most common problem—and the simplest to rectify—is that the batter around the perimeter has set before the center, allowing the center to continue rising. To prevent this from happening, wrap dampened metallic fabric strips around the sides of the cake pans. The strips keep the sides of the pan cooler, slowing down the baking at the perimeter so it doesn't set before the center does. The strips go by different names; two common ones are Magic-Cake strips and Bake-Even strips. My friend Shirley Corriher says that pinning a damp cloth around the pan can also do the trick.

Rose Levy Beranbaum is the award-winning author of *The Cake Bible (Morrow)* and *The Pie & Pastry Bible (Scribner)*.

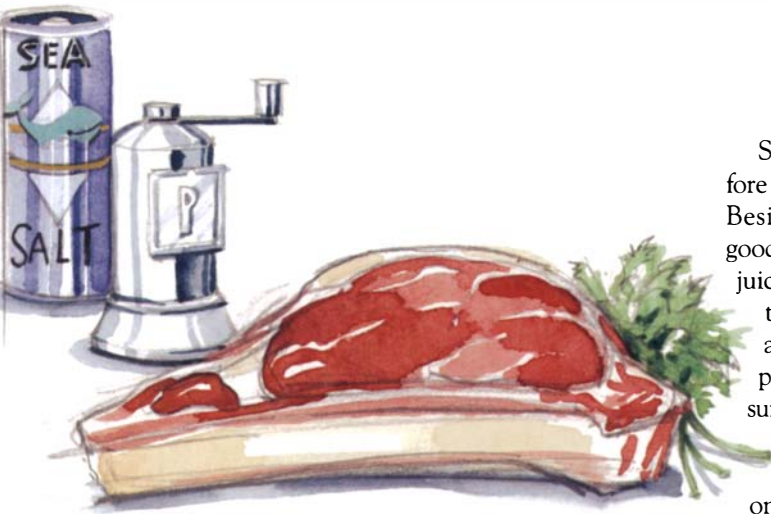
## Salting steak before cooking helps browning

*Is it true that sprinkling salt on a steak before cooking it will draw out moisture and dry out the steak, and if so, why do so many recipes recommend doing it?*

—Daniel Mackenzie,  
Dallas, TX

**Shirley O. Corriher replies:**  
It's true that salt sprinkled on a steak will pull out some juices, but this will not necessarily lead to a dry steak.

Sprinkling salt on meat will draw out moisture, but only up to a point. When the salt water on the surface of the meat is more concentrated than the liquid inside the cells, water flows out of the meat. As soon as the outside



salt water is the same concentration as liquid inside the cells, the flow of fluid leaving the muscle stops. As long as the water outside the meat is not being removed, this equilibrium occurs quickly, and there is limited water loss.

If the moisture on the surface evaporates, however, as


will occur quite rapidly under a hot sun, on a windy day, or in a very dry climate, you'll again be left with dry salt on the surface, more liquid will be drawn out until equilibrium is again reached, and the meat will dry out. This is how native Americans dried meat to preserve it.

So why bother salting before rather than after cooking? Besides adding flavor, one good reason is browning. The juices that the salt pulls out of the muscle contain protein as well as water, and these proteins help to brown the surface of the meat and produce that delicious crust that we so enjoy on steaks.

So the optimal solution is to salt the steak a few minutes before putting it on the grill or in a hot skillet—enough time to draw out some protein-rich juices but not enough time to dry out the meat.

*Shirley O. Corriher, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, wrote the award-winning Cook-Wise (William Morrow). ♦*

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**Red globe grapes** are the only seeded variety that are really popular in the United States; they're relatively new to this market. Red globes are huge, almost plum-size grapes with a rich perfume and luscious, very sweet flavor that's worth seeking out.

## Juicy Grapes for Eating and Cooking

**P**lump, juicy table grapes in graceful clusters and beautiful colors ranging from jade green to lustrous blue-black come to market throughout the summer and well into late fall. Both table grapes and wine grapes thrive in hot, dry climates, but grape varieties used for winemaking are smaller and seedier with tougher skins, and they generally prefer areas with cooler nights.

### **Full flavor, thin skins**

Fresh table grape varieties are selected for sweet, full flavor, thin skins, and a few small

seeds, or none at all. Nearly all American-grown fresh grapes are produced in California, where about twenty varieties of table grapes are harvested beginning as early as June in the Coachella Valley east of Los Angeles; harvesting then progresses up the interior valley towards the Sacramento area as the season continues.

**Table grapes are picked ripe from the vine by hand in clusters.** While wine grapes can be mechanically harvested, delicate clusters of table grapes are picked by hand. Although

grapes may soften after harvest, they won't mature. At the market, choose clusters of grapes that are plump and full with no bruising or soft spots. A reliable guide to freshness is to look at and feel the stem end of the grape bunch; it should be green and very pliable. Avoid bunches whose stems are toughened or brown with age. Many grape varieties have a white powdery coating that's called "bloom." This delicate natural protection helps keep the grapes from losing moisture, so wait to wash them until just before serving.



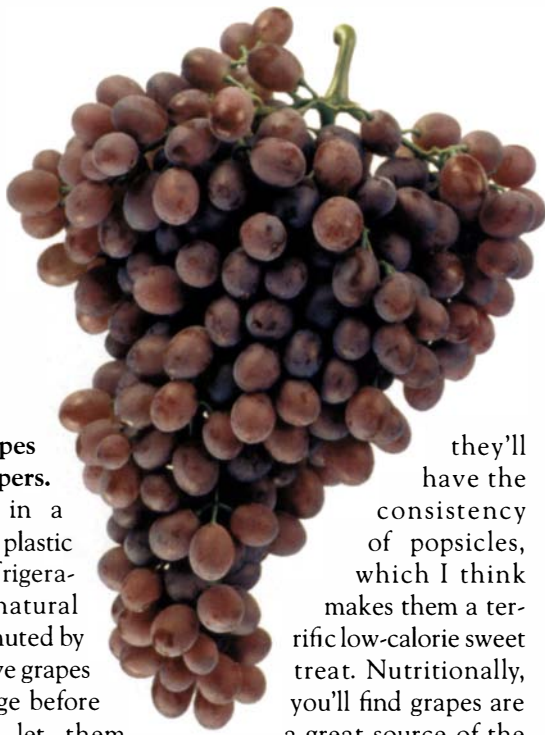
**Green seedless grapes** like Thompson Seedless are the most popular and well-known grape variety today. This familiar lunchbox grape has a mild, sweet taste and firm texture.

**Blue-black seedless grapes**, such as Beauty Seedless (shown here) or Exotic Seedless, are firm with a spicy flavor and tender flesh.



**Concord grapes** have been grown for generations as a backyard delicacy. The deep purple-black seeded fruits often have a silvery bloom on their skins. The flesh is tart and juicy, with a sweet, earthy flavor. ConCORDs make scrumptious pies and tarts, but they're quite perishable, which is why you rarely see them outside of local farmers' markets.





**Red seedless grapes** like Ruby (shown here), Flame, Crimson, and Premium Red are second only to Thompson in popularity. These grapes have a crunchy texture and a delicious sweet flavor, with just enough spicy tartness to add complexity.

Table grapes are good keepers. Store them in a loosely closed plastic bag in the refrigerator. Grapes' natural sweetness is muted by cold, so remove grapes from the fridge before serving and let them warm up to room temperature or just below.

You can also quickly freeze grapes on a baking sheet in a single layer and then bag or seal them in airtight containers. Because of their high sugar content, the grapes won't freeze solid. Instead,

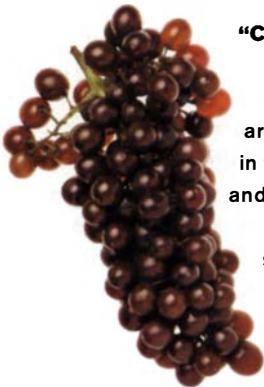
they'll have the consistency of popsicles, which I think makes them a terrific low-calorie sweet treat. Nutritionally, you'll find grapes are a great source of the natural antioxidants that are thought to help prevent cancer, so eating them can benefit your body as well as please your palate.

**Table grapes are generally categorized by color: greens, reds, and blue-blacks.** Green grapes are

sweetest when they're yellow-green; perfectly ripe examples should have a rich golden or amber cast. Red grapes are best when they're evenly colored, and blue-blacks should have a deep, rich color and a lustrous, silvery bloom. In each color group, you'll find both seeded and seedless varieties. Seedless are the most widely available in all colors because growers have found that Americans prefer them. Look for the different varieties as they become available and try as many as you can find in each color to taste differences in flavor and style.

**I find that red grapes are best for cooking.** They stand up well to heat and have the most attractive shape and color for baked desserts and tossing into salads. Green grapes are wonderful for eating out of hand. With their beautiful dark skins and depth of flavor, black grapes are a perfect fruit to grace a cheese and nut platter.

*Renee Shepherd is a gardening cook and specialty seed retailer. Her company, Renee's Garden, offers gourmet seed packets at independent nurseries.* ♦



**"Champagne" grapes** is the nickname given to the Black Corinth (also called Zante Currant) variety. These tiny purple-red berries are much smaller than other grapes and grow in tight, long clusters. They've long been dried and sold as currants, but recently these grapes have become available in specialty food stores. They're delicious served with Champagne or with dessert wine and cheese. Or try frosting them with superfine sugar.



**Blue-black grapes** like Ribier are thick-skinned, round, and deeply colored, with a jammy-sweet flavor similar to Concord grapes. Other grapes of this type include Niabell and Exotic.



**Pearlette**, another green seedless grape, is smaller than Thompson, with a frosty green color and a tart-sweet flavor.

## Gifts for cooks

To make holiday shopping for cooks easier, we've rounded up a few items that we think would make great gifts. And since there are so many web sites dedicated to cooking, we've turned to the Internet to find many of the special ingredients and equipment cooks want. Where possible, we've ordered the items ourselves to make sure that the products, delivery times, and shipping costs are as advertised (though we can't promise you'll get the same results at holiday time). We find it's a good idea to order once from a site before ordering a gift through it. We've also listed phone numbers for items that aren't yet available online and for shoppers who'd rather shop through a catalog or at a retail store.

## Pro-style Rösle strainers are pricey but well-built

Many cooks make do with flimsy, rusty strainers. Why not invest in a really good one that can last decades and do so much work in the kitchen? A good strainer is an excellent gift for a cook, and some of the best we've seen are produced by the German company Rösle. Rösle makes a range of fine- and coarse-meshed stainless strainers with conical and round baskets. Each has a long, strong handle (which doubles as a hanger) and a loop for resting the strainer on a pot. These strainers are built to last, with a price to go with that promise; for example, the 12cm (4½-inch) coarse-mesh strainer is \$36, the 14cm (5½-inch) fine-mesh is \$43.50, and the 16cm (6¼-inch) coarse conical strainer is \$63. Many are available in Sur La Table, Dayton Hudson, and Marshall Fields stores, or call Rösle's U.S. office at 302/326-4801 to find a retailer near you. Visit [www.rosle.com](http://www.rosle.com) to see other Rösle products.



## OXO's stainless measuring cups and spoons

For cooks who don't yet have a sturdy set of stainless-steel measuring cups (or who might want an extra set), these new measures from OXO Good Grips are a good choice. With bright numbers for easy measuring, and long, soft handles, they're good-looking and easy to use. The cups are \$19.99; the spoons \$9.99. For information on retailers, call 800/545-4411, or click on [www.oxo.com](http://www.oxo.com).



## Olive oil of the month club

The world of olive oils is vast, and many of the best extra-virgins are made by small producers and therefore are not easily available. A neat way to get to know some of these is through the Extra-Virgin Olive Oil of the Month Club, which ships half-liter bottles of limited-production extra-virgins picked exclusively from small Mediterranean producers in Spain, Italy,

Greece, Turkey, Tunisia, Portugal, and Morocco. Each oil highlights a particular olive variety or a specific region and the microclimate in which the olives are grown.

As a result, the flavors are distinctive. We liked each of the three we tasted—Olio Verde (Turkey), Il Signore di Toscana (Italy), and Almazara Luis Herrera (Spain). The cost per month (one half-liter bottle plus a newsletter) is \$16.95, plus \$5.45 shipping and handling. Three-, six-, and twelve-month memberships are available. For more information, click on [www.evoo.com](http://www.evoo.com) or call 800/665-2975.







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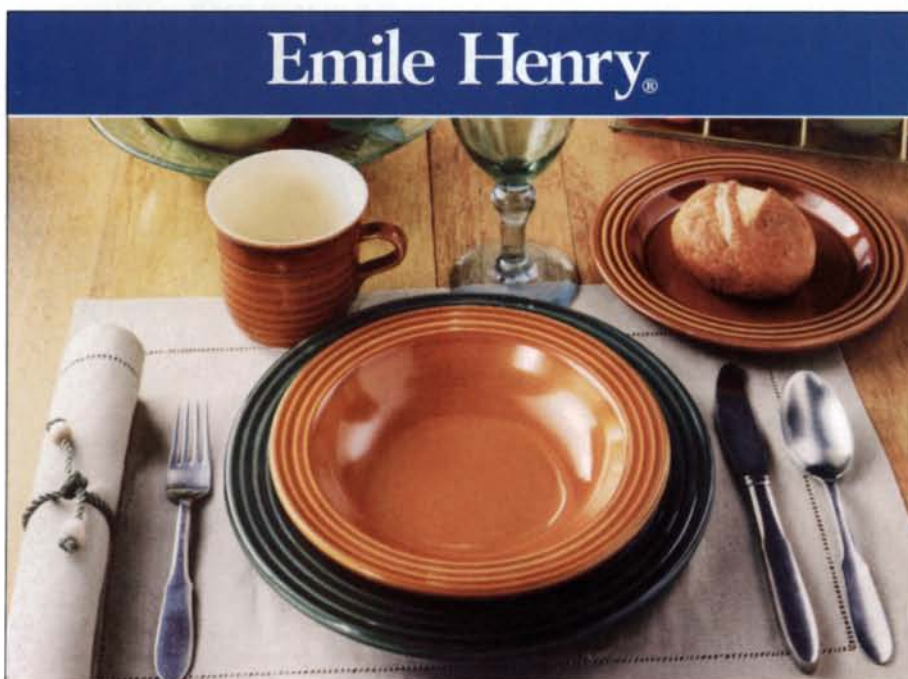
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## Nordic Ware's star bundt pan makes beautiful desserts

Holiday bakers will want to take a look at Nordic Ware's newest cast-aluminum bundt pan. The star bundt pan, created in honor of Nordic Ware's fiftieth anniversary, bakes evenly and produces a gorgeous, golden-crusted, finely detailed cake with a minimum of effort. This pan will retail for \$26, and it's available directly from the manufacturer by calling 800/328-4310.

The star bundt pan will also soon be added to the web site's shopping area at [www.nordicware.com](http://www.nordicware.com).

## Flavor-packed specialty vinegars



Among the amazing variety of vinegars now available to cooks, a few stand out for their bold flavors and smooth finish. Made from the best fruit and wine, these vinegars may cost a little more (\$10 to \$15 for bottles in the 8- to 12-ounce range), but a little will go a long way. Some notable examples come from three California producers. We like wine-maker B. R. Cohn's oak-aged Champagne and Chardonnay vinegars for salad dressings, and the Cabernet vinegar for marinades and pan sauces. The chefs at

Restaurant Lulu in San Francisco have produced a number of award-winning condiments, including two luscious fruit vinegars, fig balsamic and black cherry balsamic. Try a splash of either in a warm salad dressing or to deglaze a sautéed duck breast or calf's liver. And Cuisine Perel has introduced Chardonnay Blood Orange Vinegar, which is fresh-tasting and the deep color of blood orange juice. Its line also includes sweet late-harvest Riesling, black fig, pear, and pecan vinegars. You can find B. R. Cohn's vinegars at [www.brcohnoliveoil.com](http://www.brcohnoliveoil.com) or by calling 888/654-8350. Restaurant Lulu's products are at [www.restaurantlulu.com](http://www.restaurantlulu.com) or call 888/693-5800. Check [www.gourmettreats.com](http://www.gourmettreats.com) and [www.farawayfoods.com](http://www.farawayfoods.com) for Cuisine Perel vinegars. Or call them at 415/456-4406 for more information.

## Web gifts include chocolate club, artisan foods, and cookbooks

If you want to do your own browsing for unique gifts for cooks, there are several excellent sites. One favorite is the newly expanded [www.chefshop.com](http://www.chefshop.com). This sharp-looking, user-friendly site offers high-quality artisan foods for sale, as well as cookbooks, recipes, cooking advice, and discussion. A nice gift would be its trio of organic hand-cut marmalades and preserves from California artisan June Taylor (three different jars for \$24.99).

Another site offering unique opportunities for cooks is [www.gourmetmarket.com](http://www.gourmetmarket.com). It has three Chocolate of the Month clubs, overseen by chocolate guru Alice Medrich. The one that caught our attention was the Couverture Chocolate of the Month club (\$24.99



a month plus \$5 shipping for about 1½ pounds of chocolate per month, plus a newsletter and a recipe). Medrich will choose a different high-quality chocolate from small producers around the world, so you'll have the opportunity to cook with chocolate that you're unlikely to find in your local stores.

And be sure to visit [www.cooking.com](http://www.cooking.com) for bakeware, cookware, and other equipment, as well as specialty foods, recipes, and tips from chefs.






## Make pasta with your mixer's motor

KitchenAid has come up with yet another attachment for its stand mixer: a pasta roller and cutter. This newest add-on comes with a heavy-duty stainless-steel roller and two cutters—one for fettuccine and one for linguine. The mixer's motor spins the rollers at an adjustable speed. While you can attach a motor to hand-crank models, the extra height the KitchenAid provides is a definite plus. Instead of feeding the dough through the rollers a few inches above the counter, you're working almost a foot above, which means no hunching over as you work. (It's not too tall, either, as a 5-foot, 3-inch editor can attest.) The pasta dough also has more room to grow as it gets rolled into longer and thinner sheets.

The attachment will retail for around \$129. Check the Chef's Catalog (800/338-3232 or [www.chefscatalog.com](http://www.chefscatalog.com)), Kitchen Glamor (800/641-1252 or [www.kitchenglamor.com](http://www.kitchenglamor.com)), or A Cook's Wares (800/915-9788 or [www.cookswares.com](http://www.cookswares.com)). For more information, call KitchenAid (800/422-1230) or visit [www.kitchenaid.com](http://www.kitchenaid.com).

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# How to make a satiny, full-bodied hollandaise sauce

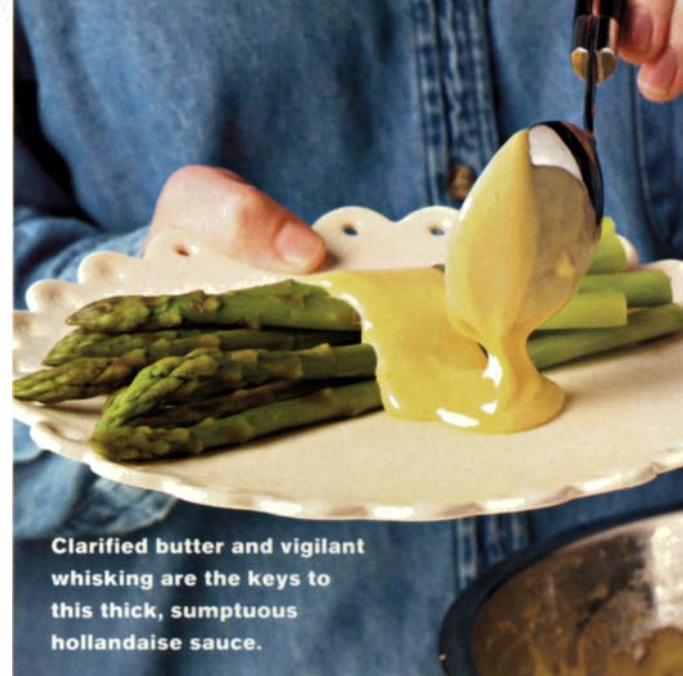
There's no denying the irresistibility of hollandaise sauce, especially one that's well made: thick yet airy, with a rich, buttery flavor brightened with a splash of lemon juice. Hollandaise, or its sister sauce béarnaise, is wonderful at the holiday table, whether paired with poached eggs for a New Year's brunch or with beef tenderloin for Christmas dinner.

Making hollandaise can be tricky, however: it's easy to overcook, it can separate (break) for seemingly no reason, and it can turn out disappointingly thin or heavy

and gluey. Knowing how to avoid these pitfalls—using the proper heat, getting the right ratio of eggs to butter, using clarified butter, and whisking to incorporate air—will go a long way toward making a successful sauce. It also helps to know that a broken sauce *can* be fixed.

## Not one, but two emulsions

One reason hollandaise is challenging is that you're trying to coax together liquids that don't normally mix, making what's called an emulsion. First egg yolks and water are whisked together over heat to



Clarified butter and vigilant whisking are the keys to this thick, sumptuous hollandaise sauce.

create a fluffy initial emulsion, which the French call a *sabayon* (not to be confused with a *sauce sabayon*, which is a dessert sauce). Butter is then slowly incorporated into the yolk-water emulsion, creating another emulsion.

**Cooking the sabayon can be tricky.** Undercooking the sabayon results in a sauce that's too thin; overcooking it creates coagulated lumps. This kind of curdling can't be

repaired. The good news is that if the sabayon does go awry, it's easy enough to start over with a few new egg yolks since you won't have wasted any butter yet.

**Skip the double boiler for better heat control.** Many hollandaise recipes suggest using a double boiler. I find that this offers a false sense of security since a double boiler offers no guarantee against overheating. Instead,

## Whisk egg yolks on and off the heat and then whisk in butter



**Strain the milk solids from the golden clarified butter.** Use a double layer of cheesecloth or a fine mesh strainer to separate one from the other.



**Whisk the eggs and water for 30 seconds off the heat.** Lift the whisk high in the bowl as you work to whip lots of air into the eggs.



**Cook the sabayon over very low heat, whisking constantly and scraping the bowl, until thick and voluminous.** The whisk will leave tracks that hold for a few seconds. At this point, take it off the heat and whisk rapidly for 30 seconds to cool it slightly.



**Add the butter a little at a time, whisking constantly.** Be sure the butter isn't too hot or it will break the emulsion. Whisk in the lemon juice, salt, and pepper.





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# TECHNIQUE CLASS

I cook the sabayon directly over low heat.

A Windsor pan (a saucepan with sloped sides) works best for cooking the sabayon because the eggs aren't able to collect in the corner of the pan where, out of the reach of the whisk, they can easily overcook. A heavy-duty metal mixing bowl—you have to hold it on one edge with a kitchen towel—also works well.

**Get ready to whisk a lot.** A metal whisk is vital to making hollandaise sauce. Vigorous whisking protects the eggs from overcooking and incorporates air into the sabayon. Be sure to lift the

the sabayon. Melted butter also has a full flavor but will result in a thinner sauce because butter is about 25 percent water. If you want a thick sauce with the smoothest texture, clarified butter—butter with the water and milk solids removed—is your best bet.

After making the clarified butter (see the sauce recipe at right), let it cool slightly before you add it to the sabayon. It should feel hot but not scalding; otherwise, it might break the sauce. Add the butter slowly and steadily, whisking all the while.

## How to fix a broken sauce

A broken sauce is a sad sight:

(which is cold and a great emulsifier besides).

If the sauce actually breaks, it can usually be repaired by very slowly beating the warm sauce into a yolk that has first been whisked vigorously with a tablespoon of cold water or heavy cream. (You're basically starting the emulsion process over.) A repaired sauce won't be as light, but it will be acceptable for most uses.

## Holding and storing

Hollandaise and its sister sauces are best made close to serving. They can be kept warm for an hour in a covered saucepan in a hot—but not

## Hollandaise Sauce

*Yields about 1½ cups.*

**10 oz. (2½ sticks) good-quality unsalted butter**  
**3 large egg yolks**  
**3 Tbs. water**  
**2 tsp. fresh lemon juice**  
**Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste**

In a heavy-based saucepan, melt the butter. If making clarified butter, simmer it rapidly for at least 10 min.; the water will evaporate and the milk solids will coagulate on the bottom and sides of the pan. Let the melted butter sit for a few minutes so the solids will fall to the bottom. Skim off the foam on top and then either decant the golden liquid, leaving the solids behind, or pour the melted butter through a cheesecloth-lined strainer.

Follow the photos on p. 20 for making the sabayon and adding the butter. Finish by whisking in the lemon juice and seasoning with salt and pepper.

## Béarnaise Sauce

Add the following infusion in place of the lemon juice and you have béarnaise sauce.  
*Yields about 1½ cups.*

**2 medium shallots, minced**  
**¼ cup dry white wine**  
**¼ cup white-wine vinegar**  
**10 crushed black peppercorns**  
**4 large sprigs fresh tarragon**  
**Salt to taste**

Combine all the ingredients in a heavy-based saucepan and simmer over medium high until 2 Tbs. of liquid remains. Strain and discard the solids. Make the hollandaise sauce as described above but omit the lemon juice; instead, whisk in 1 Tbs. of the reduction (or more to taste). Season with salt and pepper. Stir in finely chopped tarragon, if you like.

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*James Peterson, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of *Sauces*, which won the James Beard Cookbook of the Year award in 1991; it has recently been reissued by John Wiley & Sons. ♦*

## What you can fix—and what you can't



**A broken sauce can be saved.** Whisk another yolk with a tablespoon of water and then very gradually whisk the broken sauce into the yolk.



**These scrambled eggs are beyond repair.** If you overcook the egg yolks, you have to start again using lower heat.

whisk in the bowl to help accomplish the latter.

## Use clarified butter for a smooth sauce

Chefs differ on whether to use softened butter, melted butter, or clarified butter. Each has its merits and its flaws. Softened whole butter may have the most buttery flavor, but much of the airiness of the sauce will be lost because the butter will need more whisking as it's added to

thin with a grainy appearance. The likely causes are overheating, adding the butter too quickly, or adding too much butter.

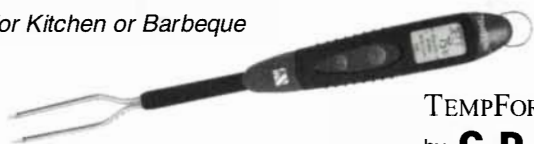
If a sauce seems too thick or on the verge of breaking—you'll see oily butter begin to accumulate on the edge of the sauce—you can often save it if you act fast. Take the sauce off the heat and slowly whisk in a tablespoon of cold water (some chefs add an ice cube) or heavy cream

too-hot—water bath. You can also store the sauce overnight in the refrigerator. To reconstitute it, melt the sauce gently. Meanwhile, whisk an egg yolk with a tablespoon of water over medium heat until the yolk begins to stiffen. Gradually beat the melted sauce—it will look severely broken—into the yolk. The sauce should come back together but it won't be as light as the original sauce.



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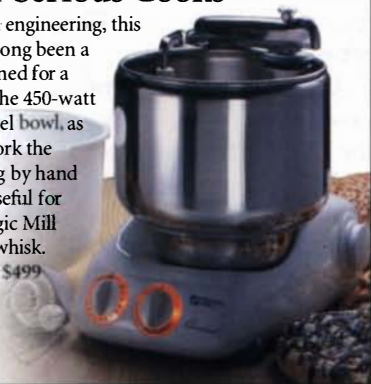
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A "waiter's friend" style corkscrew is compact and works like a lever.



The Ah-So or two-pronged cork puller works with a gentle rocking motion.



A winged corkscrew is less streamlined but works just fine.

## Choosing a Corkscrew That Works, Comfortably

**B**ecause most bottles of wine (those worth drinking, anyway) are sealed with a cork, a corkscrew is pretty much a must-have tool. (Stranded once on a camping trip, I improvised with a screwdriver, pushing the cork into the bottle. It worked, but using a corkscrew is a lot more efficient and elegant, and it's much safer, too).

In the classes I teach, though, I hear wine pros and novices alike complain about

how clumsy they feel using a corkscrew. And I often notice that when it's time to open a bottle of wine at a dinner party, many people, afraid of looking inept, gratefully hand the task off to someone else.

Using a corkscrew doesn't have to feel like arm-wrestling; there are many models available that do the job easily and quickly. Here's some help in finding a corkscrew you'll like using.

The "waiter's friend" consists of a simple handle and auger or spiral, a lever, and a short cutting blade. The best examples are made from brushed stainless steel and have a Teflon-coated auger with five turns. The Teflon coating is an important feature, as it eases the spiral more smoothly into the cork, preventing bits of cork from breaking off and falling into the wine (and ending up in your glass). There are many variations on this basic design; some can cost more than

\$100. I've used several of the most expensive models, and I don't find them that much better than the basic waiter's friend corkscrews that cost between \$10 and \$15.

Using a waiter's friend is easy: the secret is positioning the spiral at the center of the cork and pulling straight up on the cork as you remove it, letting the lever do most of the work (see the sidebar opposite). If you pull sideways, you're much more apt to break the cork.

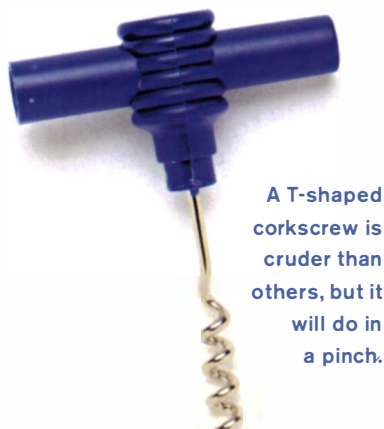
A T-shaped corkscrew will always do in a pinch. This type of corkscrew requires tugging straight up with no help from a lever, so it can easily rip out the middle of a cork that isn't sturdy. And if the cork is especially stubborn, it may even be necessary to hold the bottle between your knees as you pull, which isn't exactly the most graceful way to open a bottle of wine.

The Ah-So or two-pronged cork puller has two flat prongs

that you ease into the bottle-neck on either side of the cork. Once the prongs are completely in, you remove the cork by gently rocking the handle back and forth while pulling straight up. The Ah-So is effective and obviates the need to properly position a spiral; it's a lifesaver if you need to open a very old bottle where the middle of the cork may have disintegrated to the point where it can't be removed with a waiter's friend. Cork pullers are great for tamping a cork back into the bottle, too (just nestle the cork between the prongs and insert). A cork puller's only drawback is that the prongs can break off bits of cork.

A winged corkscrew is one of the easiest of all corkscrews to use. Just be sure the one you choose is sturdily constructed. Avoid those with especially thick, rounded augers, which can tear apart a cork.

Screwpull makes a couple of what are arguably the finest

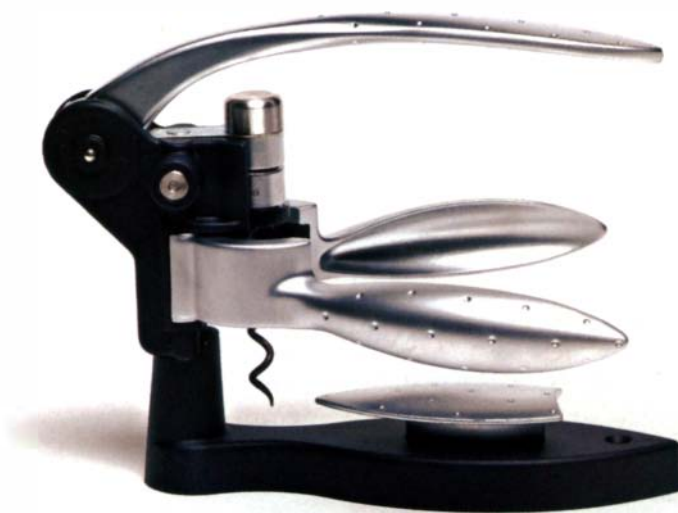


A T-shaped corkscrew is cruder than others, but it will do in a pinch.





The Screwpull Table Model has a plastic jacket to help align the auger perfectly.



Screwpull's "Elegance" Leverpull is both high-design and efficient.



A cork retriever is handy for fishing out a cork that's been pushed into the bottle.

corkscrews around. The company's Table Model (about \$30) has been called the world's best corkscrew and for good reason. Its plastic jacket positions the spiral straight up, the coated spiral glides through corks easily, and to open a bottle, all you have to do is twist the handle, with no tugging or pulling needed. I find this model extremely easy to manipulate when opening older bottles that have just been taken from a cellar and need to remain resting in a wine cradle, rather than standing straight up. The Table Model is also very effective for opening older bottles that may have long or fragile corks. It comes with its own foil cutter for removing the capsule (the wrapping on the neck of a wine bottle).

Screwpull's "Elegance" Leverpull has two arms that grip the neck of the bottle. With an effortless swing of the lever, this model quickly pops even stubborn corks. Don't be

put off by the space-age design: this corkscrew works smoothly and in seconds, and it's great for opening a lot of bottles at one time. The Leverpull isn't cheap (about \$250), but it's foolproof and combines sleek design with durability and ease.

You might also consider a cork retriever (about \$10), which comes in handy when the cork gets pushed into the bottle (which can happen even to the most seasoned sommelier). Its three long prongs quickly and easily remove an errant cork.

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Master Sommelier Tim Gaiser has uncorked a lot of wine in his time, having been a sommelier at The Cypress Club and Bix in San Francisco. He is a wine buyer for Wine.com, an online wine retailer. ♦

## How to use a waiter's friend



**Position the point of the auger in the center of the cork. Twist the auger two-thirds of the way into the cork.**



**Set the foot of the lever on the lip of the bottle and gently pull straight up. Don't pull to the side or the cork may break.**

Do you have a better way to clean fresh greens, a neat trick for handling sticky bread dough, or a new way to use an old kitchen tool? Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to [fc@taunton.com](mailto:fc@taunton.com). We pay for tips we publish.

## Keep scouring pads dry on netting from fruits

To keep small dish scrubbies and scouring pads dry, clean, and rust-free, I recycle those elastic-rimmed nets from the tops of blueberry and other fruit cartons and put them over an interesting cup that I found at the flea market. This keeps the pads out of the puddle of water that always collects under them in a dish. Each net lasts for a few months as long as you rinse it and the cup occasionally.

—Michele Mannella,  
Pittsburgh, PA

## Double up grates on a gas stove to simulate a simmer burner

Heating delicate foods like custards or cream-based soups requires a very low, even heat under the pan; pro-

set it in the freezer. When I return to the house, I check the ice cube for signs of having melted and refrozen. This tells me that the food might be suspect.

—Lilia Dvarionas,  
Kanata, Ontario

## Bulb baster draws out pan juices, leaves the fat

Until recently, I used a gravy separator to remove the flavorful juices from the fat in my pan drippings, but I've recently switched to a bulb baster. I pour the drippings into a measuring cup and plunge the bulb baster into the liquid. I squeeze the bulb to push the air and fat out of the tube and then wait a few seconds for the fat to float to the surface. Then I release the bulb and suck up all the wonderful juices, leaving the fat behind.

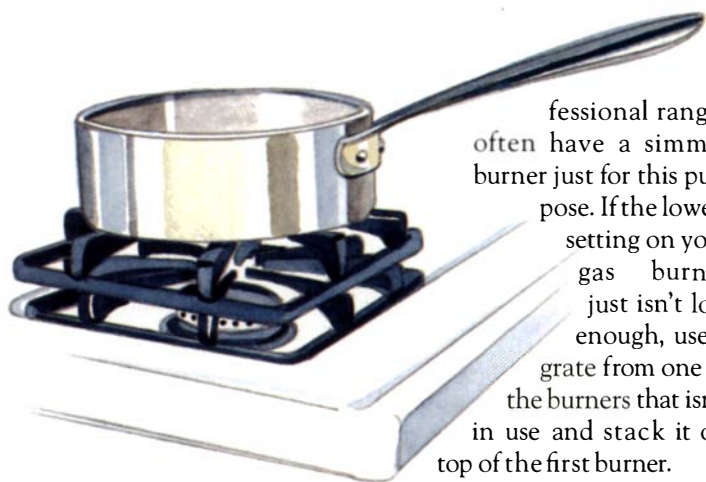
—Meredith Laurence,  
San Francisco, CA

## Cut baking powder seal so you're left with a straight edge

When I open a new can of baking powder, I use a sharp knife to cut away a section of the seal, leaving as straight



Plunge a bulb baster into a cup of pan drippings to suck up the juices, not the fat.



Stacking two grates on a gas stove helps tame the flame when cooking delicate foods.

fessional ranges often have a simmer burner just for this purpose. If the lowest setting on your gas burner just isn't low enough, use a grate from one of the burners that isn't in use and stack it on top of the first burner.

—Milton Lai,  
Forest Hills, NY

## Ice cube tells if power was lost

When I return home after a long time away, I'm always concerned that a temporary power outage might have let the food in the freezer thaw and refreeze. So before I go away, I put an ice cube on a plate or in a zip-top bag and

an edge as possible. Then when I dip a measuring spoon into the can, I don't need to use a knife to level off the measure. I just swipe the spoon past the straight edge. I also do this for other dry products that have a seal under the lid, such as spices.

—Darlene Postello Sugiyama,  
Nanaimo, British Columbia



When cutting away the seal on baking powder or spices, leave a straight edge so you can measure and level off in one gesture.



### Easier carving without the wishbone

For a chicken or turkey that's easier to carve, remove the wishbone before roasting the bird. You'll be able to cut larger, neater slices of breast meat without hitting any obstructions.

To remove the wishbone, first find it with your fingers (it's behind the neck skin). Using the tip of a small paring knife, cut through the flesh just deep enough to free the bone on both sides, leaving it attached at its three points. Then hook your finger underneath and pull out the bone.

—Debra Rich,  
Sarasota, FL

### One way to keep pizza dough from sticking to the peel...

A soft, moist dough produces an excellent pizza crust, but getting it to slide off the paddle and onto the hot stone can be tricky. You can use a lot of cornmeal or flour, but this doesn't guarantee the dough won't stick. My answer is parchment. Put a piece of parchment that's a little larger than the crust on the paddle and lay the stretched dough on top. Dress the pizza with toppings and then slide the parchment and pizza effortlessly onto the stone. About halfway through cooking, give the paper a tug and it will slide out from under the pizza. The crust comes out as brown and crisp as ever.

—Don Crane,  
Burnaby, British Columbia

### ...and another

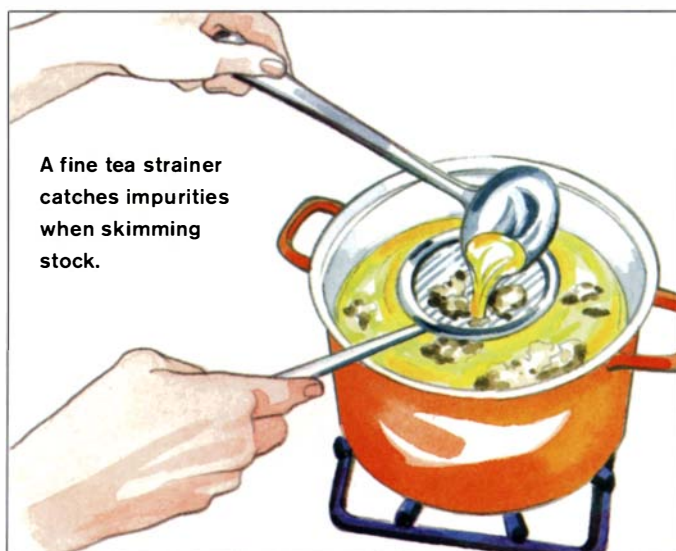
Our method of preventing pizza dough from sticking to the peel is to slip a length of dental floss under the dough

and pull it all the way under using a sawing motion immediately before slipping the pizza into the oven. This loosens the dough in case it's stuck to the peel.

—John & Carla McCarthy,  
Loudon, TN

### Use a small strainer to skim stock

When I skim the scum off soup or stock, I use a small, fine strainer and a large ladle. I hold the strainer above the pot and ladle the liquid through it. All the congealed protein and



A fine tea strainer catches impurities when skimming stock.

other impurities are caught in the strainer. I find this to be quicker and more efficient than any other method I've tried. If you don't have a very fine strainer, try lining your sieve with cheesecloth.

—Maggie Carter,  
Sowney, CA

### Clue to melon ripeness

As noted in *At the Market* in *Fine Cooking* #34, a fully ripe melon should feel heavy for its size, smell fragrant, give a little on its stem end, and make a hollow sound when you tap it. As an additional test for

honeydew and muskmelons (also known as Eastern-style cantaloupe), I shake the melon vigorously. If I hear the seeds and juice slosh around inside, I know that they have separated from the flesh and that the melon is ready to eat.

—David M. Walt,  
Little Rock, AR

### Ginger stays fresh in a flower pot

To keep a chunk of fresh ginger from drying up, I keep it covered with soil in a small terracotta pot. As long as I



Carve out a cork to make a drizzling spout for vinegar.

into the bottle. (For narrow bottlenecks, you might need to pare down the diameter of the cork.) With a shake of the bottle, I get a drizzle of vinegar or sauce.

—Isidro Blasco,  
New York, NY

### Maintain the shape of refrigerator cookies

Here's a trick that I've found helpful for maintaining the shape of those great checkerboard cookies and other holiday cookies from *Fine Cooking* #30. Each time you slice off a cookie, rotate the log one-quarter turn. (For square cookies like the checkerboard ones, this means rolling it to the next flat side; for round cookies, just a quarter turn or roll will do.) This maneuver minimizes the shape distortion that the pressure of the knife blade can cause (turning square cookies into rectangles and round cookies into half moons) by evening out the flattening effect. A little reshaping with the hands every few slices will help, too.

—Cherie Twohy,  
La Canada, CA ♦

moisten the soil with water occasionally, the ginger stays fresh for quite a long time.

—Lily Naidu,  
Renton, Washington

### Replace vinegar cap with a cork for drizzling

For bottles of vinegar, soy sauce, or other condiments that don't include a fitted plastic drizzle top, I improvise my own sprinkler system with a wine cork. Using a sharp paring knife, I carve out two narrow wedges along the length of the cork on opposite sides. Then I push the cork

# Tender

**G**iving small dinner parties during the holidays is a special way for me to connect with friends and family during a really busy season. So when I want something beautiful, delicious, and just a little bit fancy, I make a stuffed roast. It tastes great, it's quick and easy to prepare in small or large quantities—and in my experience, it has always been a show-stopper at the table.

Stuffed roasts have a reputation for being difficult, but the loin cuts I'm using here make the preparation especially easy. There's no butterflying, pounding, or rolling required; instead, just pipe or spoon the stuffing into a channel you cut right through the eye of the loin. The tenderness of the cut allows the roast to cook fairly quickly. And you can stuff these roasts hours in advance and stow them in the refrigerator, which is a huge help where party planning is concerned.

## **Boneless loin offers ease and a uniform shape**

I like to use cuts from the loin for a couple of reasons. First, of course, is great flavor. Second is because the

# Roasts,

Stuff a pork, beef,

## Make room for the stuffing



**Insert a long, thin-bladed knife straight through the center of the roast** as far as you can, with the cutting edge to the right. Make a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cut to the right, turn the blade 180°, and make a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cut to the left. Repeat, this time going up and down to make a + like incision. If your knife didn't go all the way through, repeat on the other side.



**Push the end of a wooden spoon through the completed channel** to even out and enlarge the space. If the spoon is too short to go the length of the roast, repeat on the other end.



**With a pastry bag or zip-top bag, pipe half of the filling into one side of the tenderloin.** Repeat on the other side. The tenderloin's diameter will almost double.



# Savory Fillings

or veal center cut for a more succulent main dish

BY GWEN KVAVLI GULLIKSEN



meat is more tender—this muscle runs along the backbone of the animal so it doesn't get much of a workout. The tenderness of the cut lets the roast cook faster than a tougher muscle, such as a leg or shoulder cut, would. And the consistency of its shape and muscling gives the loin the versatility of being served as thick medallions or as thin slices.

For both the pork and veal roasts, look for what's called "boneless loin" (also called the "top loin," as opposed to the tenderloin, which is the smaller, more tender part that runs underneath); for the beef roast, ask for tenderloin or filet (beef tenderloin is wide enough to stuff). The loin muscle changes shape as it

descends the spine, so if you're ordering from the butcher, ask for a center section. That way, you're sure to get even portions. You may have to order a boneless veal loin or a beef tenderloin a day or two ahead, but between the cooking ease it offers and the tender results you'll get, it's worth the extra planning.

I pick a main stuffing component to suit the meat and then go from there. With pork, apples come to mind right away; I like the way olives and feta offer briny contrast to tender beef filet; and veal pairs beautifully with mushrooms. Then I select a second component to complement the first: spicy chorizo with tart-sweet apples; sweet red peppers

**A neat preparation for an elegant occasion.** Pork, veal, and beef roasts get star treatment in these recipes, each with a stuffing to complement its flavor.

with salty feta and olives; and tender-sweet butter-nut squash with earthy wild mushrooms.

**To fill the roast, simply cut an incision.** To prepare the loin for stuffing, you'll need a knife with a long, thin blade. Follow the photos on p. 28. Use unwaxed dental floss and a large needle to sew up the ends to make sure the stuffing doesn't fall out during roasting (see below). I like to use a chain hitch to tie these, because it reminds me of the finger-knitting I did as a kid, but individual ties work fine, too.

**Stuffed roasts can feed four or twenty-four;** I've even made them for parties of 200. If you're cooking for a crowd, buy a longer loin that's the same diameter or cook several small ones, doubling or tripling the amount of stuffing. The more meat you have in the oven, the longer the cooking time, but with roasts, doneness depends much more on girth than weight. More on that in a second.

### Test for doneness deep into the roast

There's always a bit of suspense when it comes to testing a roast for doneness when you can't see inside and the piece of meat is too big to just poke to test for rare or medium rare. But these small, evenly shaped muscles actually require very little guesswork.

**With roasts, girth is as important as weight.** A fillet that's smaller in diameter will cook more quickly



**To test accurately for doneness, insert a thermometer as close to the stuffing as possible, and go as far into the middle of the loin as you can.**

than a thicker one, even if they weigh about the same. All the roasts in these recipes measure about 2½ inches in diameter before stuffing. If you end up with a roast that's a bit slimmer than that, just start testing for doneness a few minutes sooner than the recipe tells you to.

**An instant-read thermometer is a must for doneness testing.** If you don't have one, invest in a thermometer that costs about \$10, which will last longer than the less-expensive model. Position the thermometer as close to the stuffing as possible and insert it as far as you can, as in the photo above. (You'll notice a small dimple on an instant-read that's about an inch from the point. That's the part where the temperature actually registers). The USDA recommends cooking pork to 160°F, but I like the juicy effect I get from cooking it to just above 140°F. I don't like to go above 145°F; higher than that and the pork will dry out. I like to pull the beef and veal roasts out at about 130°F for medium rare. Remember that the temperature of the roast will rise a few degrees as it rests.

For the  
neatest  
result,  
stitch  
and tie  
the roast



**Loosely sew unwaxed dental floss across the ends, creating a mesh to hold in the stuffing.** Leave the floss ends long for easy removal after cooking.



**Tie the roast with kitchen twine, spacing the ties about an inch apart.**

## RECIPES

### Chorizo-Stuffed Pork Loin with Green Apple Salsa

If you can find pork bones, roast them in the pan along with the pork loin: they'll give you flavorful drippings for the pan sauce. *Serves four.*

#### FOR THE PORK:

**3 oz. fresh chorizo or other fresh spicy sausage**

**½ cup toasted breadcrumbs**

**1 fresh jalapeño, cored, seeded, and minced**

**2 scallions, thinly sliced**

**¾ cup unpeeled, diced Granny Smith apple, tossed with lemon juice to prevent browning**

**1½ lb. center-cut boneless loin of pork, trimmed**



1 Tbs. olive oil  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

**FOR THE SALSA:**

3 small unpeeled Granny Smith apples, finely diced and tossed with lemon juice to prevent browning

½ cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves

1 small red onion, finely diced (to yield 1 cup)

Juice of 2 limes

1 Tbs. honey

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

**FOR THE SAUCE:**

½ cup water

½ cup dry white wine

2 Tbs. unsalted butter, cut into pieces

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

**To prepare the stuffing**—In a mixing bowl, combine the sausage, breadcrumbs, jalapeño, scallions, and apple. Mix well and transfer to a pastry bag without a tip or to a heavy-duty zip-top bag with a corner snipped off; refrigerate.

**To prepare the pork**—Heat the oven to 425°F. Stuff, sew, and truss the pork loin as shown on pp. 28–30. Rub the pork with the olive oil, season it with salt and pepper, and transfer it to a small flame-proof roasting pan (you won't need a rack). Roast until an instant-read thermometer registers just over 140°F, 45 to 50 min. When testing for doneness, be sure to insert the thermometer as far into the loin and as close to the stuffing as possible. Remove the floss and twine, tent the roast with oil, and let it rest for 5 to 10 min. The roast will continue to cook as it rests.

**To prepare the salsa**—While the roast is cooking, combine the apples, cilantro, onion, lime juice, honey, and olive oil in a nonreactive mixing bowl. Toss well and season with salt and pepper. Set aside at room temperature.

**To make the sauce and serve**—Spoon off any visible fat from the roasting pan but keep all the juices in the pan. Heat the pan, add the water and white wine, and bring to a boil, scraping up any browned bits that have stuck to the pan with a wooden spoon. Continue cooking until reduced to ⅓ cup (the juices should have a saucy consistency) and whisk in the butter. Season with salt and pepper. Carve the roast into even slices and serve with the salsa and sauce.

## **Beef Tenderloin Stuffed with Roasted Red Peppers & Olives**

Anything green, such as baby green beans or steamed spinach, would be a beautiful side dish to let the colors on the plate play on a holiday theme. *Serves four.*

1 medium red bell pepper, roasted, peeled, seeded, and finely diced

7 kalamata olives, pitted and chopped

1 to 2 large cloves garlic, minced

2 Tbs. toasted pine nuts

2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

3 Tbs. crumbled feta cheese

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1 lb. center-cut beef tenderloin, silverskin trimmed



2 Tbs. olive oil

1 clove garlic, halved crosswise

In a small mixing bowl, combine the pepper, olives, minced garlic, pine nuts, parsley, and feta. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a pastry bag without a tip or to a heavy-duty zip-top bag with a corner snipped off. Refrigerate until ready to use. Heat the oven to 425°F. Stuff, sew, and truss the tenderloin as shown on pp. 28–30. Rub the beef with the olive oil and the halved garlic clove. Season with salt and pepper and transfer to a small flame-proof roasting pan or ovenproof skillet (you won't need a rack). Roast until an instant-read thermometer reads 130°F for medium rare, 18 to 20 min. When testing for doneness, be sure to insert the thermometer as far into the tenderloin and as close to the stuffing as possible. Remove the floss and twine, tent the roast with foil, and let it rest for 5 min. before slicing. Carve the roast into even slices and serve.

*(Continued)*

**Chorizo-stuffed pork loin holds together beautifully, which makes it a cinch to cut neat slices.**

**Beef Tenderloin with Roasted Red Peppers & Olives has a savory stuffing that contrasts deliciously with tender, silky filet.**





**Drippings make a delicious pan sauce.** Gwen Gulliksen skims off all the fat before deglazing with wine or stock and then reducing for more body.



**Veal Tenderloin with Wild Mushrooms gets drizzled with a pan sauce** that's fortified with porcini soaking liquid.

### **Veal Loin with Wild Mushrooms & Butternut Squash**

An assortment of cremini, shiitake, and chanterelles are delicious in the stuffing. Dried porcini add oomph and depth. This stuffing also works well with pork.  
*Serves four.*

#### **FOR THE ROAST:**

- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- ¼ lb. (2 cups) assorted fresh wild mushrooms, cleaned, trimmed, and chopped**
- ½ oz. dried porcini, soaked for 30 minutes in 1 cup warm water; mushrooms chopped, soaking liquid strained and reserved for the sauce**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**
- ½ very small butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and diced (to yield 1 cup)**
- 2 shallots, minced (to yield about ½ cup)**

- 2 Tbs. minced garlic**
- 2 tsp. minced fresh sage (or 1 tsp. dried)**
- 1 lb. center-cut boneless loin of veal, trimmed**
- 2 Tbs. olive oil**

#### **FOR THE SAUCE:**

- ¾ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock**
- Reserved porcini soaking liquid**
- 3 Tbs. unsalted butter, cut into pieces**
- 1 Tbs. heavy cream**
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste**

**To prepare the stuffing**—In a large sauté pan over medium-high heat, melt the butter. Sauté the fresh mushrooms and the porcini until nicely browned, about 7 min. Season with salt and pepper. Add the squash, shallots, garlic, and sage. Sauté over medium heat until the squash is *al dente*, about 5 min. Let cool. Transfer to a pastry bag without a tip or to a heavy-duty zip-top bag with a corner snipped off; refrigerate.

**To prepare the veal**—Heat the oven to 425°F. Stuff, sew, and truss the veal as shown on pp. 28–30. Rub the veal with the olive oil, season it with salt and pepper, and transfer it to a small flameproof roasting pan or ovenproof skillet (you won't need a rack). Roast until an instant-read thermometer registers 140°F, 20 to 30 min. When testing for doneness, be sure to insert the thermometer as far into the loin and as close to the stuffing as possible. Remove the floss and twine, tent the roast with foil, and let it rest for at least 5 min.

**To make the sauce and serve**—Spoon off any visible fat from the roasting pan, leaving all the juices in the pan. Add the stock and reserved porcini soaking liquid; bring to a boil, scraping up any browned bits with a wooden spoon. Continue cooking until the sauce is syrupy and reduced to less than half, about 10 min. Whisk in the butter and cream. Season with pepper. Carve the roast into even slices. Set a slice in the center of the plate, drizzle with sauce, and serve.

*Gwen Gulliksen is the executive chef for Bon Appétit Management Company at The Getty Center in Los Angeles. ♦*



## **Each roast wants its own wine**

Pork, beef, veal: there's enough variation in the main ingredients of these roast recipes, as well as in the flavors that season them, to give each roast its own separate focus.

The beef recipe is the punchiest of these dishes and therefore needs the biggest wines. The red bell pepper and olives in the filling could echo nicely with a middle-

weight Cabernet that carries a touch of the same flavors. You won't have to hock the silver, though: good examples such as J. Lohr of Monterey, Benziger of Sonoma, and Wynns Coonawarra Estate from Australia can be found for \$15 or under.

Partners for the pork will set you back even less. To play up the sweet, tart apples in the salsa and to balance

the spice in the chorizo, seek out a fruity, slightly sweet white such as Riesling (Kiona from Washington; Wagner Vineyards of New York's Finger Lakes region), Gewurztraminer (Mark West of Sonoma; Thomas Fogarty of Monterey), or Chenin Blanc (Husch from Mendocino; Llano Estacado from Texas).

For the elegant veal with its rich, dusky stuffing of

wild mushrooms and sage, why not open your wallet a bit wider and treat yourself to a really fine Pinot Noir to tie in all the earthy flavors? Look for these cool-climate Oregonians: Eyrie, Fiddlehead, or Domaine Drouhin.

*Rosina Tinari Wilson teaches food and wine pairing in the San Francisco Bay area.*



# Golden, Crisp Chicken Cooked “Under a Brick”

Sear a split whole chicken under a heavy weight and finish it in the oven for a crackling crust and moist meat

BY JOSEPH VERDE

Our customers laugh when they hear the name of one of our restaurant's most popular dishes—Chicken Under a Brick. But once they taste it, they all want to know how they can get the same results at home—that crisp, crackling, golden brown skin and moist, juicy breast and thigh meat. Fortunately, this technique of searing a split chicken under a heavy weight (ideally a foil-wrapped brick) is easy to adapt to a home kitchen. In fact, Italian families, especially in Tuscany, have been cooking what they call *pollo al mattone* for centuries.

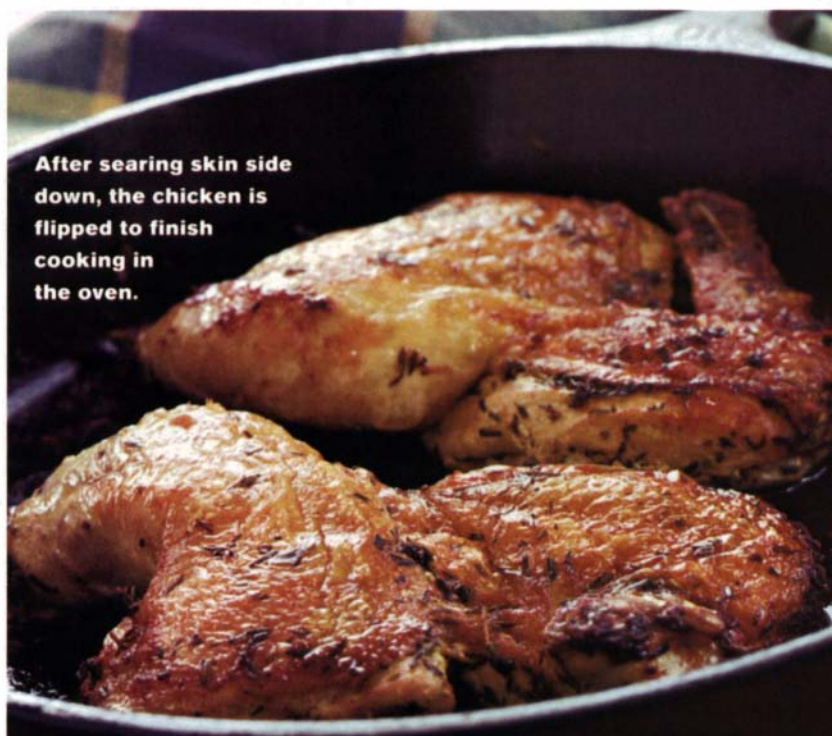
There really are only two secrets to cooking chicken under a brick. The first is preparing the chicken so that it lies flat; the second is simply weighting the chicken so that the skin makes contact with the hot pan and the chicken cooks evenly.

## Start with a small, fresh chicken

At the restaurant (Oscar's in New York City's Waldorf-Astoria), we use young chicken for this dish. I like young chicken for its taste and tenderness, and also for its size. But young chicken, called poussin, is hard to find at the grocery store, so at home I use a small, fresh (not previously frozen),



**“It’s a crowd-pleaser, whether I’m making it for my restaurant customers or for my family at home,” says Joe Verde.**



**After searing skin side down, the chicken is flipped to finish cooking in the oven.**

whole chicken (a 3-pound fryer, rather than a larger roaster) with great results. I always look for a free-range chicken, as I think they're more flavorful. You can also use this technique with Cornish game hens.

**Choosing the chicken is the easy part; the next step, partially boning the bird, is a little trickier.** But don't worry: with a little patience, a big cutting board, and a couple of sharp knives (see the photos below), you'll be successful. The process ensures that the bird flattens easily when the brick is set on top of it. And flattening the chicken is key for two reasons: it exposes the maximum surface area of the chicken skin to the heat of the pan, which ultimately creates the crackling, crisp exterior; and it makes the meat an even thickness so it cooks more evenly—the breast and thigh cook at the same rate and stay juicy, too.

By following these directions, you'll wind up with two chicken halves, which I think make very manageable portions (each fits nicely under one brick.) But if you decide to cook baby chickens or Cornish game hens under a brick, butterfly them and remove the other bones as described below, but don't split them completely in half. What you'll have is a "spatchcocked" bird (you may have seen this term used in old recipes for small game birds) that's neat enough to cook in one small package.

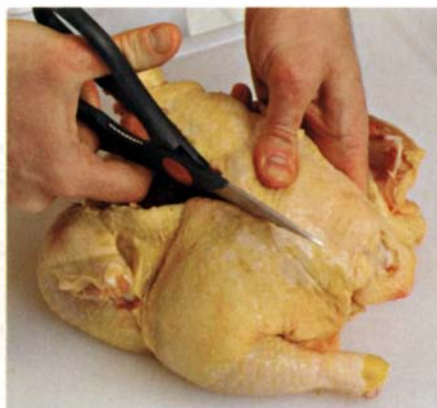
**I like to marinate the prepared chicken overnight**, or for at least four hours. I use really flavorful olive oil, fresh thyme and rosemary, and crushed garlic cloves—a traditional Tuscan preparation for marinating split chicken. You can skip this step if you like, but for the best flavor, I wouldn't.

## How to split and partially bone a chicken

**Set the rinsed and dried chicken on a cutting board** that's large enough to accommodate the whole bird after it's split. Put a damp towel under the cutting board to prevent slippage.



**1** Cut off the first two wing joints on each wing with a chef's knife or a cleaver.



**2** Turn the chicken breast side down on the cutting board and remove the backbone with poultry shears or a sharp chef's knife. Cut along one side of the backbone and then back down along the other. You'll cut through the rib cage at one end and the thigh joint at the other.



**3** Remove the keel bone. Cut a short incision in the middle of the top of the keel bone (this has cartilage on the top end) and flatten the chicken. The keel bone should partially pop out. Trim the rest of it away with a paring or boning knife. Now cut the bird completely in half.



**4** Hack off the knuckle from each drumstick with a cleaver or with the heel of a chef's knife.



**5** Slide a sharp paring knife under the ribs on both chicken halves and carefully cut them out.



**6** The partially boned chicken can now lie flat in a pan and will cook evenly.



**Get out your largest, heaviest sauté pan.** Part of the rustic appeal of cooking chicken under a brick is using an old-fashioned cast-iron pan. You'll get the best crust with one, although a heavy enameled Le Creuset skillet works well, too. But in a pinch, you can use your heaviest stainless-steel pan as long as it isn't nonstick. Before you start cooking, wrap your bricks well in a couple of layers of aluminum foil.

Now all you have to do is follow the recipe below to cook this delicious chicken (and fill your house with incredible aromas). I use a common restaurant technique to cook the chicken—starting it on the stove (with the skin side down to render fat and create a crisp crust), and finishing it in the oven (to cook the chicken through). Just remember to put the brick on top of the chicken as soon as it hits the pan, before the skin has time to contract from the heat.

When the chicken is done, it will be a deep golden brown, the skin will be almost cracker-like in its crispness, and the meat will be moist and fragrant.

## RECIPE

### Chicken Under a Brick

Start planning this dish a day ahead so that you can marinate it overnight. I like to serve the crisp chicken with a side of silky mashed potatoes as a foil. Serves two; can be doubled to serve four.

**3- to 4-lb. chicken (fryer)**  
**2½ Tbs. fresh thyme leaves, roughly chopped**  
**2 Tbs. fresh rosemary, roughly chopped**  
**6 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed**  
**1 cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**Vegetable or olive oil, as needed**

Rinse the chicken in cold water and pat dry. Follow the directions in the sidebar at left to split and partially bone the chicken. Rinse and dry the chicken halves again. Combine the thyme, rosemary, garlic, and olive oil in a large zip-top bag or mixing bowl. Add



**As soon as the chicken hits the pan, cover each half with a foil-wrapped brick** before the skin has a chance to contract.

the chicken halves. Cover and refrigerate overnight (or for at least 4 hours).

Heat the oven to 450°F. Wrap two bricks in a couple of layers of foil. (If you don't have bricks, use heavy rocks, 2-lb. weights, or another heavy pan weighed down with cans.) Remove the chicken from the refrigerator, let the excess marinade drain off, and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Set a large cast-iron or other heavy ovenproof pan over medium-high heat. When hot, add just enough vegetable oil to lightly film the pan. Put the chicken halves, skin side down, in the pan and immediately put a brick on top of each half. Turn the heat to medium and cook (without moving the chicken) until the skin is a deep golden brown (check with a spatula) and the chicken is cooked about halfway through, 20 to 25 min. Remove the bricks, turn the chicken halves over, and put the pan in the hot oven to finish roasting the chicken until a thermometer registers at least 165°F, another 20 to 25 min.

*After helping to successfully relaunch Oscar's at the Waldorf=Astoria in New York City, Joseph Verde has taken on another role as executive chef of the Millennium Hilton in New York City's financial district. ♦*



**Remove the bricks and turn the chicken over** once it has a deep golden crust. Put the whole pan in the oven to finish cooking.

# Baking a Classic Potato Gratin

Wafer-thin slices and lots of cream are key to this satisfying side dish

BY MARTHA HOLMBERG

Every culinary repertoire should have a dish that is dead simple and yet has the cachet of being something special, the kind of dish that when you put it on the table, everyone says, “Oh, wow, I just love...” whatever it is. My dish is a classic French potato gratin, which takes about 15 minutes to get into the oven, is made from ingredients that you probably already have in your kitchen, and is the perfect complement to both “fancy” main dishes, like rack of lamb or beef tenderloin, and “homey” dishes, like roast chicken or meatloaf.

You’ll find many versions of this dish, called *gratin dauphinoise* in French (pronounced gra-TAN doh-fee-NWAHZ); mine is a simple marriage of potatoes and cream, with a few seasonings and a sprinkle of cheese. After 40 minutes in the oven, this gratin becomes so much more than just potatoes and cream—textures change, flavors develop, and the thing transforms itself into a nutty, rich, satin-textured whole that’s way more than the sum of its fairly commonplace parts.

**The potatoes are low-fat, but the cream’s not** I think Yukon Golds are perfect for this dish. Actually, I think Yukon Golds are perfect for a lot of dishes. They have a sweet, nutty flavor, and they’re a great balance between being starchy—so they get soft and creamy when cooked—and being waxy (like a boiling potato)—so they keep their shape better than baking potatoes. But if you can’t find Yukons, do use a starchier potato, which should be labeled baking potato, Idaho, russet, or russet Burbank. You want the potato to have some starch to mingle with



**A steady base for an even slice.** If the potato wobbles as you cut, flip it onto a wider side.

the cream during cooking, and you want the slices themselves to have a buttery-soft final texture.

**As for the cream, let me say this: if you’re looking for a low-fat dish, this is not it.** This dish is full of cream, and no, there’s no substitute. There are versions of potato gratin that use half-and-half, or even stock, but for the kind of dish that makes your guests keep saying, “Oh, I think I’ll just have one more little slice,” and makes you keep thinking, “Oh, I hope they don’t eat the whole thing—I want some for breakfast,” you need real cream, and lots of it. And there’s a technical reason for using cream, too: when a milk product is cooked with an acid (potatoes are quite acid), it can curdle unless the butterfat content is 25% or higher (see Basics, p. 72).

I put a delicate layer of shredded Gruyère cheese on top of the dish. Notice I say delicate, because if the cheese is too coarsely shredded or if the layer of it is too thick, it can get tough and separate from the underlying potatoes. So use the fine holes on your grater and don’t be tempted to load up on the cheese. Imported Gruyère, Emmentaler, or Comté will have the perfect nutty-mellow flavor. Grocery-store brand “Swiss” cheese won’t, so just leave the casserole plain...you certainly don’t need to add the cheese for richness.

**While this dish is extremely easy to assemble, you do have to pay attention to slicing the potatoes.** They must be really uniform and really thin—uniform because you want them all to cook at the same rate so each bite is evenly tender, and thin because thin is the key to the magic of this dish. Think



**No need for neat layers.** Just shake the dish to settle the slices.





**A deep golden color and thick cream are signals that the gratin is done. Poke the potatoes to be sure.**

of it this way: if you have two pounds of thinly sliced potatoes, it means you have lots of slices and therefore lots of surfaces for starch to come out of and for cream to go into. The intersections of cream and potato are what make the texture so wonderful, and with more slices you have more intersections in every bite.

So since perfect slices are critical, making this dish will be your motivation to sharpen your knives. Or to buy a mandoline slicer, if you've always wanted one (see *Fine Cooking* #32, pp. 43–45, for an article about slicers). Fortunately, getting perfectly round slices isn't important, because we're not going for a perfect overlapping look. That means that you can use the trick in the photo above left to keep the potato steady as you slice all the way to the end.

The only other word of caution about making this dish is be careful of cooking it in too hot an oven or for too long. While you must cook it long enough for the alchemy to take place, if you go too far, the cream will separate and the butterfat will start to break out. Watch for this as the potatoes go through distinct stages of cooking: first you'll see lots of mad bubbling of cream, which makes you say, "This can't possibly

be right; it's swimming in cream." Next, the amplitude of the bubbling decreases, but the frequency stays high because the cream is getting thicker; the top of the gratin also starts to brown. The last phase is small bubbles, thick cream, and just the first few drops of yellow butterfat appearing around the edges of the pan. Take the dish out of the oven the moment you see any butterfat.

The other key to this dish is not to serve it right away—give it a good 15-minute rest; it will still be hot on the plate, but the cream will form a more clingy cloak around the potatoes. This is actually a very important thing to know about a lot of food—roasts, steaks, lasagne, fruit pies. Letting the dish cool and relax a bit before serving it lets liquids redistribute, textures even out, sauces thicken up, and flavors come to the fore.

The last thing to know about this dish is that it's delicious the next day, cold, with maybe just the chill taken off by a few minutes in the oven or a few seconds in the microwave. Serve a wedge of cold *gratin dauphinoise* with a simple green salad dressed in a fairly sharp vinaigrette, ideally made with walnut oil, and congratulate yourself on being such a good cook.

## RECIPE

### Classic Potato Gratin

Try to get a good-quality Gruyère or Emmental, which will be moderately assertive yet mellow and nutty. Serves six to eight.

**2 lb. Yukon Gold or russet potatoes, peeled**  
**3 cups whipping or heavy cream**  
**1 tsp. coarse salt**  
**½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**  
**Generous pinch of freshly grated nutmeg**  
**2 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed**  
**¾ cup finely shredded Gruyère, Emmental, or Comté**

Heat the oven to 400°F. Using a very sharp knife or a mandoline, carefully cut the potatoes into ⅛-inch slices (no thicker).

Put the potatoes in a large heavy-based saucepan and add the cream, salt, pepper, nutmeg, and garlic. Cook the mixture over medium-high heat until the cream is boiling, stirring occasionally (very gently with a rubber spatula so you don't break up the slices).

When the cream boils, pour the mixture into a 2½- or 3-qt. baking dish. If you don't want a tender but garlicky surprise mouthful, remove and discard the garlic cloves. Shake the dish a bit to let the slices settle and then sprinkle the surface with the cheese.

Bake in the hot oven until the top is deep golden brown, the cream has thickened, and the potatoes are extremely tender when pierced with a knife, about 40 min. Don't worry if the dish looks too liquidy at this point; it will set up as it cools a bit. Before serving, let the potatoes cool until they're very warm but not hot (at least 15 min.) or serve them at room temperature.

Martha Holmberg is the editor of *Fine Cooking*. ♦

# French Toast Stuffed with a Creamy Filling

For a do-ahead breakfast, stuff the bread the night before; the next morning, just sauté and bake

BY DONNA LEAHY

No matter what else I put on the breakfast menu, my repeat guests all request the same thing: stuffed French toast. That's probably because they've learned that stuffed French toast is the chameleon of my menu—never the same, yet always delicious. I've been serving it at my inn in Pennsylvania Dutch Country for ten years, and I'm still coming up with new renditions.

Once you know the method, you too will want to experiment, combining cheeses for an innovative filling, trying out a new kind of bread, or turning a favorite fruit preserve into a warm glaze. Stuffed French toast is ideal for entertaining since you can do most of the work ahead. In fact, the dish benefits from a night in the refrigerator. The bread absorbs more of its eggy coating, and the filling firms up for better texture.

## Choose the bread and think through the filling

You'll need a loaf of unsliced bread so you can cut extra-thick slices and make a pocket to hold the filling. Choose bread with a texture that's firm enough to



**To make the pocket, insert a sharp knife** into the center of the top crust of the bread and then work the knife in both directions, cutting to within  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch of the sides and bottom. Be careful not to puncture the sides.



**Squeeze the bread gently to part the opening.** Spoon in a few tablespoons of the room-temperature filling, being careful not to overstuff or tear the bread. Wipe any extra filling from the opening with a clean paper towel.



**Dunk the stuffed bread in a mixture of egg and heavy cream** to fully coat each side. Stand the slices in a baking dish, cover, and refrigerate overnight.





Out of the frying pan, into the oven. Sauté, bake until heated through, and serve.



**A hint at what's to come.** Peeking out of these just-baked cinnamon bread slices is a sweet, creamy apricot and three-cheese filling.

hold up to a bit of handling but that's still light enough to absorb the egg coating. Challah is a fine choice, and I find that Italian or French breads with soft crusts are also good. Here in Amish country, I can get loaves of unsliced raisin or cinnamon bread; if you have a favorite bakery bread that isn't too dense, try it out.

In classic French toast, or *pain perdu*, the bread surrenders itself completely to the egg dip. But in stuffed French toast, the super-thick slices of bread don't soak up as much egg, so it's the filling and the syrup that deliver most of the flavor and moisture.

**I like to combine two cheeses in the filling**, such as cream cheese, sour cream, ricotta, or perhaps mascarpone. I also use grated hard cheeses like Cheddar and Monterey Jack, a crumbly cheese like Gorgonzola, or a softer cheese like chèvre. You can mix and match, but be aware that too much cream cheese can overwhelm the other flavors. The filling should be fairly stiff since it has to withstand a quick sauté and several minutes in the oven. Test a new filling by baking a bit in a small ramekin for about eight minutes. It should be somewhat firm, not too loose or runny.

**Enhance the base filling with fruit and spices.** If you're using fruit, choose those that benefit from baking, like apples and pears. Save softer fruits like strawberries and raspberries to use in the syrup or as a garnish. Fruit preserves, citrus zests, and flavor extracts are good additions. Avoid using fruit juices: they'll make the filling too runny. The most important thing is to consider each component of the dish to be sure you don't have clashing flavors.

### While the bread bakes, prepare the syrup

Slice the bread thickly, make a pocket, stuff the bread and dip it into the egg mixture following the photos at left. Sometimes I add a crunchy coating as well, like cornmeal or ground nuts. If you're assembling the dish the night before, put the stuffed, dipped bread in a baking dish, cover tightly with foil, and refrigerate.

In the morning, sauté the bread until golden brown and then bake until the filling is heated through. Depending on the filling, the bread may puff up ever so slightly. Be careful not to overbake or the bread will dry out and the filling will get too runny.

You can prepare any syrups or toppings ahead, but mine are so simple that I make them while the stuffed French toast bakes. I use fresh fruit syrups or warmed preserves to complement sweet fillings. In some cases, pure maple syrup is a fine match, too. When the stuffed French toast is ready, spoon on the syrup and sit down to enjoy the dish—and the accolades.

## RECIPES

### Stuffed French Toast

Use one of my suggested fillings or invent one of your own. *Serves six.*

**6 slices (1½ inches thick) bread (challah, Italian, French, or other medium-textured loaf)**  
**Prepared filling (recipes follow)**

*(Recipe continues)*



**Pass the syrup, please.** Blueberry and apricot glazes are excellent with fruit-filled French toast, as is reduced apple cider spiked with cinnamon and cloves.



**Coming apart at the seams?** Not really, but this fully stuffed slice of challah French toast delivers some apple and cream cheese filling in every bite.

**6 large eggs**  
**½ cup heavy cream**  
**1½ Tbs. unsalted butter**  
**1½ Tbs. corn oil**  
**Prepared syrup or glaze (recipes follow)**

Create a pocket in each slice of bread by following the photos on p. 38. Spoon in 2 or 3 Tbs. of the prepared filling until the pocket is full but not bursting; the amount will depend on the size of bread. Tap the bread on the counter to settle the filling.

In a medium bowl, whisk the eggs and cream. Dip each slice of stuffed bread into the egg mixture, soaking each side for about 1 min. to coat well and evenly. Stand the pieces upright in a baking dish and drizzle with any remaining egg mixture. Cover and refrigerate.

When ready to serve, heat the oven to 375°F. Lightly grease a baking sheet. In a large skillet, heat the butter and oil over medium high until the butter is melted and foamy. Sauté as many pieces as will fit comfortably in the pan at one time, turning once, until golden brown on both sides, about 2 min. per side; the bread will puff up a bit. Continue with all pieces. Put the sautéed pieces on the greased baking sheet and bake until the filling is heated through, 6 to 8 min.

### Apple Filling with Cider Syrup

Use firm, slightly tart baking apples, such as Macintosh or Rome. I like to stuff this filling in raisin bread. *Yields 2¼ cups filling and 1 cup syrup.*

**FOR THE FILLING:**  
**8 oz. cream cheese, at room temperature**  
**2 Tbs. sugar**  
**½ tsp. ground cinnamon**  
**¼ cup sour cream**  
**1 cup coarsely chopped apple**

**FOR THE SYRUP:**  
**1 cup apple cider**  
**¾ cup light brown sugar**  
**¼ tsp. ground cloves**  
**½ tsp. ground cinnamon**  
**2 Tbs. unsalted butter**

**To make the filling**—In a medium bowl, combine the cream cheese, sugar, and cinnamon and beat with a hand mixer on high speed until smooth, scraping the sides of the bowl as necessary, about 1 min. Gently stir in the sour cream and apple until just combined.

**To make the syrup**—In a medium saucepan, whisk together the apple cider, brown sugar, cloves, and cinnamon. Bring the mixture just to a boil and then lower the heat and simmer until thickened and reduced to about 1 cup, 8 to 10 min. Stir in the butter until melted. Serve warm over stuffed French toast.

### Lemon Filling with Blueberry Syrup

If you can find mascarpone, replace the cream cheese with ¼ cup mascarpone and increase the ricotta to 1 cup. *Yields 1¼ cups filling and 1½ cups syrup.*

**FOR THE FILLING:**  
**4 oz. cream cheese, at room temperature**  
**1 tsp. lemon extract**  
**1 tsp. finely chopped lemon zest**  
**2 Tbs. sugar**  
**¾ cup part-skim ricotta**

**FOR THE SYRUP:**  
**2 cups fresh (or frozen) blueberries**  
**½ cup sugar**  
**2 tsp. fresh lemon juice**

**To make the filling**—In a medium bowl, combine the cream cheese, lemon extract, zest, and sugar and beat with a hand mixer on high speed until smooth, scraping the sides of the bowl as necessary, about 1 min. Gently stir in the ricotta until just combined.

**To make the syrup**—In a medium saucepan, combine the blueberries, sugar, and lemon juice. Heat over low heat, stirring constantly until the sugar dissolves, 2 to 3 min. Increase the heat and bring the mixture just to a boil. Lower the heat to a simmer and cook for another 2 min., stirring constantly. Remove from the heat. Serve warm over stuffed French toast.

### Apricot Filling with Apricot Glaze

Cinnamon bread is great with this filling. *Yields 1½ cups filling and 1 cup glaze.*

**FOR THE FILLING:**  
**4 oz. cream cheese, at room temperature**  
**¼ cup apricot preserves**  
**¼ cup grated Monterey Jack cheese**  
**¾ cup part-skim ricotta**

**FOR THE GLAZE:**  
**1 cup apricot preserves**  
**¼ cup brandy**

**To make the filling**—In a medium bowl, beat the cream cheese with a hand mixer on high speed until smooth, scraping the sides of the bowl as necessary, about 1 min. Beat in the apricot preserves. Gently stir in the Monterey Jack and ricotta until just combined.

**To make the glaze**—In a small saucepan, combine the preserves and brandy. Bring the mixture just to a boil. Remove from the heat. Serve warm over stuffed French toast.

*Donna Leahy is the chef-owner of The Inn at Twin Linden in Narvon, Pennsylvania. ♦*



# Making a Pair of Old-Fashioned Candies

BY KAY FAHEY

For the best homemade candy, grab a candy thermometer and a heavy pot and get ready to stir like mad

How many times have you longed for the taste of a homegrown tomato in the dead of winter? Longed for the juicy-firm texture, the pleasing aroma, the indescribable flavor of a garden tomato that can never be approached by mass-market imitations? Believe it or not, homemade candy is the same way. If you were lucky enough to grow up in a household with a holiday tradition of candymaking, you're probably nodding your head right now, muttering, "That's exactly right." The rest of you will have to taste to believe how deliciously different your own candy will be.



Wrap up Golden Molasses Taffy (left) and Mrs. Bruner's Boston Cream Candy for unforgettable holiday gifts.

These are the real reasons to make candy—the taste, the smell, the texture. That, and the fun you'll have doing it. Making pulled taffy has always gone hand in hand with gathering a few friends or family members in the kitchen, having a cup of hot chocolate, and laughing at everyone showing off their biceps as they pull ropes of taffy. And then, once the candy is done, there's all that sampling to do. Even if you're planning to give the candy away as a gift, you won't be able to resist cutting off a square of Mrs. Bruner's Boston Cream Candy for yourself. This soft, nutty confection tastes a bit like caramel fudge. I hope these two recipes will help introduce you to the joys of making old-fashioned candy.

### Get out a heavy pot and pick a fine, clear day for candymaking

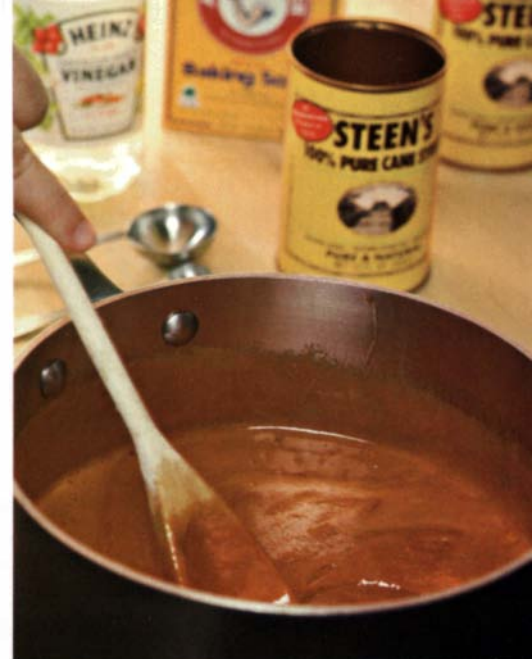
To make candy, all you'll really need is a heavy pot, a clear space of time, and for many candies, a dry day. Not all candies require that you watch the weather (Mrs. Bruner's Boston Cream Candy is one that doesn't), but many (including taffy) must be made when the sky is cloudless and the humidity low, preferably under a high pressure system. Think of the crisp, clear air of a perfect late fall or early winter day; these are the ideal conditions for candymaking. Humidity can prevent

your candy from setting up properly, because sugar is hygroscopic—it absorbs moisture from the air. So if you're cooking the candy on a damp day and trying to evaporate the water, the sugar will thwart your efforts by quickly reabsorbing moisture. Depending on the level of humidity, your taffy may work, but it will ultimately be sticky and gooey.

One more thing—you need time. Although candymaking isn't physically demanding (well, except for a little muscling of taffy and stirring of sugar syrup), it does require a straight half hour or two.

About the pot: a heavy base helps prevent the sugar syrup from burning, especially important since it will cook for some time. A nonreactive surface prevents discoloration. Also, a wooden spoon is best for stirring.

Finally, for these recipes, I strongly recommend using a candy thermometer. Technically, you don't have to. The procedure for making both of these candies begins with boiling a sugary solution until it reaches a certain consistency. There are two ways to tell when you've reached the desired stage. The first is the old "cold-water test" (where you drop a bit of the cooked syrup into a cup of very cold water and then feel the drop; its consistency indicates what the texture of



**Be sure to use a heavy 3-quart saucepan for making taffy. When the syrup comes to a boil, insert a candy thermometer, reduce to a simmer, and cook the syrup to 275°F.**

your candy will be like when it cools). The second, and easier, method is by determining its temperature. The cold-water test, which allows you to feel the texture of the cooled syrup, is actually more reliable than the thermometer, because it takes into account mysterious interactions between humidity, air pressure, temperature (and perhaps mischievous fairies) that a simple thermometer

## Cane syrup is the tastiest molasses for taffy

Molasses terminology is confusing, to say the least. In broadest terms, molasses is a by-product of refining sugar, a result of plant juices being boiled down to a syrup.

Sugar crystals are extracted from that syrup, and the remaining liquid is molasses. The sugar is extracted in three stages, and each stage produces a different grade of molasses. Cane syrup (sometimes called *light*, *fine*, *grade A*, or *fancy molasses*) has the lightest, most delicate flavor. This is the molasses I like to use in taffy. Grade B, often found in



supermarket brands, is less sweet and more darkly flavored. It's a good choice for baked goods like gingerbread. The

last grade is blackstrap, an intense and bitter syrup.

But the grading system doesn't tell the whole story, because the flavor of molasses also depends on the type of plant juices from which it came. These days, molasses is often derived from the sorghum plant. If you like the taste of sorghum, there's nothing wrong with sor-

ghum molasses. But before sorghum came along, molasses was made exclusively from sugar cane. If you prefer the haunting taste of raw sugar cane, cane syrup is the molasses for you.

Years ago, many large farmers made their own cane syrup. You can still find locally produced cane syrup throughout the South, where it's drizzled on pancakes, waffles, and biscuits, but it's hard to find in the rest of the U.S. Fortunately, the C. S. Steen Co. in southern Louisiana is happy to ship their excellent cane syrup. I recommend going to the small trouble of ordering it

to make your taffy. Steen's is even tastier than other fancy molasses because none of the plant sugars have been extracted from its cane syrup. (For mail-order information, see p. 83.)

This might explain why another cane syrup is nice but not quite as flavorful. Lyle's Golden Syrup (available in grocery stores) is imported from Britain. It too is a product of sugar cane, yet it has a much lighter flavor than Steen's. It's still fine to use in the taffy recipe; try substituting an ounce or two of it with grade B molasses from the grocery store to fill out the flavor.







**Cool the mixture on a buttered sheet pan or marble slab, occasionally lifting the edges with a spatula and folding the taffy in on itself.**

cannot measure. But until (and even if) you feel comfortable with judging candy this way, use a thermometer. Your sugar mixture could continue cooking beyond the point you want it to in the space of time it takes you to do the cold-water test. (For good information on the cold-water test, see *The Joy of Cooking*.)

Candy thermometers are available in most kitchen shops and many grocery stores. Look for one that has a clip to hold it to the side of the pot; otherwise it will constantly topple over. Before you start cooking, be sure to test that your candy thermometer is accurate by submerging it in boiling water; it should read 212°F. Even a brand-new thermometer can be inaccurate. It's also a good idea to warm your thermometer under hot running water before submerging it in the hot candy mixture. Once you insert your thermometer, check to make sure that the tip is fully submerged in the candy mixture but not touching the bottom of the pan.

### **Be prepared and don't stop stirring**

I hate to tell you this, but when a recipe says "stir constantly," you really do have to stir constantly. Sugar burns, even in syrup form, and burnt sugar will give your candy an unpleasant flavor. More important, stirring the syrup helps form the crystals that will give your candy its de-



**Divide the candy into two or more parts for easier pulling.** Here, one person pulls half a batch with buttered hands, stretching the taffy from hand to hand in a rope 1 to 2 feet long.



**Fold the taffy back onto itself, twisting the rope as you go.** Don't worry if it seems to fall apart; just keep pushing and folding it back together until you can stretch it into a rope again.

sired texture. (For more on crystallization, see *Food Science*, p. 76.)

Because you must stir most candies constantly once they begin to cook, employing *mise en place* is important. Roughly translated, have everything where you can grab it fast. Making candy is a bit like having a baby: things go really slow for a long time, and then everything happens all at once. Measure all your ingredients and have them within reach. Butter the pan for the candy or the slab or sheet pan for the taffy ahead of time. Have your pitcher of iced tea (or cup of hot cider) close by, and plan a way to pass the time (if you don't have friends over, you might want to read).

But don't get too distracted. You'll discover the mercury in the candy ther-



**The taffy will begin to get harder to pull and will start to lighten in color.** When it's almost plastic and turns a deep ash blonde, stretch the taffy into ropes about 3/4 inch in diameter.



**Cut the taffy ropes into bite-size pieces.** Work quickly, as the taffy will stiffen a bit as it sits. Then wrap each piece in waxed or parchment paper.



momometer will hover forever at a certain place. The first time I saw this phenomenon, I thought my thermometer was broken and ran out to buy a new one. Which did precisely the same thing. It sits for minutes and then, right at a critical stage, the thermometer suddenly surges upward. For example, this stalling behavior occurs just before the syrup approaches 240°F when making Mrs. Bruner's Boston Cream Candy.

### Homemade candies make excellent gifts

Mrs. Bruner was in her 80s when she shared her recipe for Boston Cream Candy with my family. Her family brought it with them from "back East" to Oklahoma Territory when her father began work with the Kiowa tribe. Her candy is one of the few you can make on a damp day, and it takes only about half an hour.

Mrs. Bruner's is smooth and creamy, a sort of nutty vanilla fudge, rich with butter and caramel flavors. Firm enough to cut into squares, it melts in the warmth of your mouth, a flood of flavor as complex as a fine cognac. It's so delectable that people

who have received it as a holiday present call to ask for it again the next year.

Pulled molasses taffy, on the other hand, is a long-time southern favorite. You pull and twist the cooled syrup until it turns a silky-blond color and hardens in your hands. Unlike the salt-water taffy you find in stores, this taffy is a hard candy. Don't try to chew it at first—it softens into a caramel as you savor it, so sticky it could pull your fillings out.

This taffy is mellow and buttery, but not too rich; its sweetness is positively addictive. It's made with cane syrup (which is really fancy molasses derived from sugar cane), so it has gentle echoes of molasses flavor, but none of its sometime harshness. (For more on cane syrup and molasses, see the box on p. 42.) Just be sure to check the sky for clear weather before you decide to make taffy; on the Mississippi farm where she grew up, my mother made taffy on sunny autumn days.

## RECIPES

### Mrs. Bruner's Boston Cream Candy

Don't be tempted to use anything smaller than a 3-qt. pot for this delicious caramel fudge-like candy. You'll need the volume when the hot, sugary liquid foams up during cooking. *Yields about 1 pound.*

**4 Tbs. unsalted butter; more for the pan**  
 **$\frac{2}{3}$  cup coarsely chopped pecan pieces**  
**2 cups sugar**  
**Pinch salt**  
 **$\frac{1}{2}$  cup light Karo syrup**  
 **$\frac{1}{4}$  cup half-and-half**  
 **$\frac{1}{4}$  cup whipping cream**  
 **$\frac{3}{4}$  tsp. baking soda**  
**1 tsp. vanilla extract**

Butter an 8x8-inch baking pan. Line the pan with a piece of parchment large enough to hang over two sides. Butter the paper, too, and tuck it flat against the pan. Put the chopped pecan pieces in a handy spot where you'll be working. Combine the sugar, salt, Karo syrup, half-and-half, cream, and butter in a heavy-based 3-qt. pan, stirring with a wooden spoon over low heat until the sugar is completely dissolved. This can take a while, and it's hard to see; you should feel the texture (rub a little between your fingers or run your finger along the mixture clinging to the spoon) to be sure all the sugar is dissolved. Turn the heat to medium and cook, stirring, until the mixture foams to a boil.



**Stir constantly after adding the baking soda to Boston cream candy.**

It will foam up when you add the soda, but it will then gradually subside.



**Insert a candy thermometer and keep stirring as the color lightens and the temperature climbs just to 240°F.**

Add the baking soda. Lower the heat and stir like mad. The mixture will double in volume and then gradually subside and begin to take on a golden hue. After the mixture settles a bit, put in a warmed candy thermometer. Continue to stir constantly, scraping the sides, and cook over medium-low heat until the thermometer registers just 240°F. Watch very carefully, as the thermometer will hover at 239° for a while and then move up. You must remove the mixture before it passes 240°F.

Remove the pot from the heat and take out the thermometer. Continue to stir quickly. The candy will look like a loose caramel sauce. Add the vanilla (watch out, it may sputter) and stir carefully to incorporate. Add the pecans and continue stirring quickly. Don't take your eyes off the mixture at this point. Watch and feel it as it begins to thicken, lighten in color, and be-

## If you live at high altitudes...

Altitude can wreak havoc with candy. Folks who live at sea level needn't worry about this, but those of us who live in the mountains or high desert ignore altitude at our own peril. The rule is simple: for every 500 feet above sea level, lower the cooking temperature of candy by 1 degree. So if you live at 5,000 feet, and the recipe calls for cooking the syrup until it reaches 240°F, you cook it until it reaches 230°F instead.

You'd think this means it takes less time to make candies at higher altitudes, but unfortunately, it just isn't so. In fact, your cooking time may be slightly longer. (You know how much longer it takes water to boil? Same thing.). Also, the rule isn't quite hard and fast; you may find you need to adjust it by a degree or two.



come harder to stir. When it has thickened enough to leave a path on the bottom of the pan while you're stirring, it's just about ready. The moment you notice that the mixture is just beginning to lose its glossy shine, turn it out into the buttered pan. Don't wait until the mixture looks completely matte or it will be too dry when you try to cut it. If you stop stirring at the right moment, the mixture will firm up almost the second it hits the pan. Too soon, it will never be anything more than caramel (although very good caramel); too long, it will harden in the pot.

As soon as the candy cools (15 to 20 min.), cut it into squares. It will probably have tiny bubbles on top. It may well crumble when cut. If it doesn't harden immediately, just let it sit for several hours, even overnight, and it may harden. If not, you have great caramel.



**Off the heat, add the vanilla and pecans and keep stirring. The mixture will look like a loose caramel and will be quite glossy.**



**When the mixture thickens and just begins to lose its gloss, and a spoon leaves a path, it's ready to be poured out.**

## Pulled Golden Molasses Taffy

Make this mouthwatering candy with a friend to help with the pulling. You'll need a large uncluttered area for cooling and pulling the taffy. Don't be tempted to use a smaller saucepan as the mixture greatly increases in volume after the baking soda is added. *Yields 1 pound.*

**1½ Tbs. unsalted butter; more for the slab or pan, the pot, and your hands**  
**2 cups cane syrup or light (grade A) molasses (see Sources, p. 83)**  
**2 tsp. white vinegar**  
**¼ tsp. salt**  
**½ tsp. baking soda**

Butter a large marble slab or a jelly roll pan. If using a pan, set it on potholders or towels to protect your counter from heat. Have a parchment-lined sheet pan handy.

Coat a heavy 3-qt. saucepan with a light film of butter. Combine the cane syrup and vinegar in the pot. Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring, and then reduce heat to a simmer and insert a warmed candy thermometer. Make sure the ball of the thermometer is immersed in the liquid so that the temperature will register correctly. Continue to cook, stirring, until it just reaches 275°F. Remove it from the heat.

Add the butter, salt, and baking soda. The mixture will foam rapidly to four times its original volume and become a much lighter butterscotch color. Continue to stir (the foam will subside and the color will deepen) until the foaming stops, about 3 min. Remove the thermometer and pour

the mixture out onto the buttered marble slab or jelly roll pan. Let cool slightly.

Grease a large metal spatula and have a large pat of butter (at least a few tablespoons) ready to grease your hands. When the candy is just cool enough to touch at the edges, use the spatula to lift the edges of the candy, draw them to the center, and let them drop. Continue folding the candy in on itself until it's cool enough to pick up. Pick up the candy (divided into two or more sections if you have people to help you pull) and begin pulling, twisting, and folding as shown on p. 43. Twist the candy as you pull it, and pull in short lengths (a foot or so) for better control. If the candy does get stringy, just mash and push the strings together with your thumbs and palms and it will form one strand again. Grease your hands as necessary, continuing to pull and twist as the candy begins to lighten in color and becomes more difficult to pull. Keep pulling until the candy is very tough to pull and seems almost plastic. It will have turned a silky dark ash-blond color. Pull the candy into a thin rope (¾ inch in diameter) and begin snipping off bite-size pieces (about ¾ inch long) with greased scissors. Wrap in pieces of waxed paper or kitchen parchment and store at room temperature (not in the refrigerator, which will make it sticky). If left unwrapped, the candy may spread (as if it were melting).

*Kay Fahey is a writer in Reno, Nevada, where her lucky friends will get their usual supply of holiday candy again this year. ♦*



**Boston Cream Candy will crumble a little** when you cut it. For easiest cutting, line your buttered baking pan with buttered parchment so you can lift it out in one block.

# Uncommonly Good

Add good-quality chocolate—*not* cocoa powder—to steaming milk and whiz in the blender for a warm and frothy winter treat

BY RICHARD DONNELLY

When most people make hot chocolate, they reach for the cocoa powder and sugar. Not me. I've nothing against plain cocoa; in fact, I use it to make an incredible chocolate whipped cream (see the recipe on p. 48). But when the yen for hot chocolate strikes, as it often does this time of year, I'm looking for a deep and intense chocolate flavor, as well as a rich and satisfying texture.

The trick is to use good chocolate instead of cocoa powder. Cocoa powder is made by extracting most of the cocoa butter from chocolate liquor (ground roasted cocoa beans) and pulverizing what remains. Chocolate, on the other hand, is chocolate liquor that's blended with cocoa butter, vanilla, and sugar. The added ingredients, combined with the extra processing that chocolate undergoes (such as conching, which makes it smooth), make all the difference.

For hot chocolate, I like the flavor of bittersweet chocolate. If you crave a touch more sweetness, you might instead want to try semisweet, which usually contains more sugar and less chocolate liquor than bittersweet. Whichever type you choose, make sure it's the best quality you can find.

Some folks judge chocolate by its combined percentage of chocolate liquor and cocoa butter (the more, the better), but I find that more doesn't necessarily mean superior chocolate. The quality is just as important as the percentage. For me, tasting tells all. I note the chocolate's mouth feel as well as its taste and aroma. Does it melt in my mouth? Does it leave an unpleasant aftertaste? A lot of chocolates do. Trust your own taste.

I generally prefer European chocolates because they tend to be made from better-tasting cocoa beans, which are roasted at lower temperatures for a longer time, developing deeper flavor. I like Valrhona Gua-



**Thirty seconds in the blender is all it takes to foam hot milk. To avoid hot splashes, cover the top securely with a towel and start on low.**

naja, a bittersweet chocolate made in France (see Sources, p. 83). I think it's the best chocolate available, with a clean flavor and no lingering aftertaste.

**To chop up the chocolate, either shave the block on a grater or break it into small chunks with a knife.** I use a hammer to break up big chunks of chocolate (you can too, if you use the hammer *just* for chocolate: don't go grab one from the toolbox). If you're using a chef's knife, use the heel, not the tip. You can even use a blender or food processor to chop a small amount of chocolate, though that's not my usual method. The pieces should be fairly small (about ¼ inch) so they'll melt quickly in the milk.

Chocolate pairs well with a startling variety of flavors, something I've discovered through years of making chocolates, candies, and truffles. Who would have thought that cardamom and chocolate go together, or that ginger and chocolate would be such pleasing partners? So even though I'm sure you'd be perfectly content to stick with my basic hot chocolate recipe forevermore, I'm suggesting a few variations on the theme. In the box on p. 48, you'll see some unusual combinations, along with some matches that you've probably already thought of, like mint hot chocolate.

**Use a blender or a steamer for frothy hot chocolate**

The final technique I use to transform my hot chocolate into something really soothing is to froth the milk. If you're a cappuccino or latté drinker, you prob-



# Hot Chocolate

RECIPES

## Hot Chocolate

*Serves two.*

**3 cups whole milk**

**3 oz. bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, chopped into small bits (¼-inch pieces are fine)**

**For frothy hot chocolate**—Bring the milk just to a boil. Put the chocolate in a blender and pour in the hot milk. Let sit for 10 to 15 seconds so the chocolate begins to melt and then cover securely, place a folded towel over the lid, and blend until completely mixed and frothy, about 30 seconds. (Alternatively, you can use a steamer to froth the milk. Add the chocolate, stirring until melted and well blended, and then steam the mixture again for a few seconds more.)

**For unfrothy hot chocolate**—Heat the milk in a saucepan until it just begins to boil. Remove the pan from the heat, add the chocolate, and stir or whisk until well blended.

## Two ways to top off hot chocolate

As long as you're making the effort to make extra-good hot chocolate, you might as well go for an extra-good homemade topping. A large dollop of freshly whipped cream is never out of place on hot chocolate, of course. But chocolate whipped cream is even better. If you really want to wow yourself and your guests, try making your own marshmallows. They're not difficult, and they are truly fantastic, but start a day ahead.

## Marshmallows

These will keep in an airtight container for about two weeks. *Yields about 1½ pounds, or 32 marshmallows.*

**4 Tbs. unflavored powdered gelatin**

**1½ cups water**

**½ tsp. vanilla extract**

**2 cups sugar**

**1 Tbs. light corn syrup**

**2 large egg whites, at room temperature**

**½ cup each cornstarch and confectioners' sugar, mixed in a bowl, for dusting the pans and waxed paper**

Soften the gelatin in ¾ cup of the water in a small saucepan. Heat the gelatin slowly to fully dissolve it, but don't let it fully boil. Stir in the vanilla.

In a saucepan, combine the sugar, the corn syrup, and the remaining ¾ cup water. Set over medium heat and stir until the sugar dissolves. Increase the



**Unexpected toppings make the drink intriguing as well as warming. A homemade marshmallow is surprisingly good. And why not make the whipped cream chocolate? Float it on hot white chocolate.**

ably like your milk really frothy, as I do. There are a couple of ways to achieve this effect. You can use a milk steamer to froth the milk and then stir in the chocolate pieces until melted. A blender also works. Just be sure to secure the lid and hold it down firmly as you blend. It's also a good idea to place a folded towel on the blender lid in case any hot milk leaks out.

If frothy hot chocolate isn't for you, mix the chocolate and any other flavorings into milk that has been brought just to a boil in a saucepan. Or use a microwave to heat the milk and chocolate together. Heat at medium-high power for three to four minutes, removing and stirring halfway through.

# Gelatin firms up meringue for pillowy marshmallows



**Soften gelatin in water and start a sugar syrup boiling.** When the syrup is 250°F, whisk in the dissolved gelatin.



**Beat the hot sugar syrup into beaten egg whites.** After a few minutes, the mixture will thicken.



**Scrape the mixture into two prepared pans.** Smooth the top the best you can. In a few hours, it will be springy and firm.

heat and bring the mixture to a boil. Set a candy thermometer in the pan and, without stirring, let the mixture boil until it reaches 250° to 260°F (hard-ball stage). While the sugar mixture is boiling, beat the egg whites in the large bowl of a standing mixer fitted with the whisk attachment (or on high speed with a hand-held mixer) until they form medium-stiff peaks.

When the sugar syrup reaches temperature, whisk in the dissolved gelatin. Turn the mixer back on to the highest speed. Slowly pour the hot sugar syrup into the whisked egg whites, avoiding the

whisk. The whites will get liquidy at first but will eventually thicken. Continue beating until the marshmallow mixture thickens enough to hold its shape, about 5 min.; it will still be slightly warm.

Lightly oil two 8-inch-square pans and then dust them with some of the cornstarch and confectioners' sugar mixture. Divide the marshmallow mixture between the two pans, smooth it as flat as you can with a spatula, and let it sit uncovered until it's springy and firm, 4 to 6 hours.

Using your fingers or a sharp knife, loosen the marshmallows from the sides of the pans. Dust a long sheet of waxed paper with more of the cornstarch mixture. Flip the marshmallows onto the paper. Dust the surface with more of the cornstarch mixture and let the marshmallows sit for about 2 hours.

With a sharp knife or scissors, cut the marshmallows into even strips about 1½ inches wide and then into squares. The marshmallows probably won't stick to the knife or scissors, but if they do, try oiling the blade.

## Get creative with hot chocolate

The following hot chocolate variations all make two servings. To try them, make the adjustments as noted below and then follow the instructions for Hot Chocolate on p. 47.

### ◆ Hot White Chocolate—

A soothing drink that's a bit sweeter than the basic hot chocolate. To make, replace the bittersweet chocolate with 2 oz. white chocolate, such as Callebaut. Serve with chocolate whipped cream (see the recipe at right).

### ◆ Irish Coffee Hot Chocolate—

This one is great served with whipped cream. Use only 2 cups milk and add ½ cup strong coffee. Put 2 Tbs. whiskey (more or less to taste) in the blender with the chocolate.

### ◆ Hot Chocolate with Ginger & Cinnamon—

Ginger gives this drink a nice bite. To make, add ¾ tsp. ground cinnamon and ½ tsp. ground ginger to the milk before heating.

### ◆ Mint Hot Chocolate—

Fresh mint gives a clean, fresh taste. Add 6 to 8 mint leaves to the heated milk and let steep for 10 min. Reheat the milk and strain out the mint. Blend with 3½ oz. chopped chocolate. Garnish each cup with a mint leaf.

### ◆ Hot Chocolate with Cardamom—

Add ¼ tsp. ground cardamom to the milk before heating.

## Chocolate Whipped Cream

This is also quite good in coffee. It keeps in the refrigerator for several days. *Yields about 2 cups.*

**¾ oz. (¼ cup) unsweetened Dutch-processed cocoa powder (I like Valrhona)**  
**3 Tbs. confectioners' sugar**  
**1 cup heavy cream, well chilled**  
**½ tsp. vanilla extract**

In a small bowl, mix the cocoa and confectioners' sugar. In a chilled bowl, combine the cream and vanilla and whip until soft peaks form. With the mixer running or while whisking by hand, gradually pour in the cocoa mixture; whip until well blended.

*Richard Donnelly is the owner of Donnelly Fine Chocolates in Santa Cruz, California.* ◆



# Choosing Among Citrus Juicers



**Still popular,** the wooden reamer was patented in 1867. Oxo's metal model is a modern take.

When looking for your main squeeze, consider price, counter space, elbow grease, and how often you crave fresh-squeezed juice

BY JOANNE McALLISTER SMART

Serious cooks know the value of fresh-squeezed citrus juice. It's used in marinades and vinaigrettes, on vegetables and fish, in cakes, tarts, and sorbets.

But how to get that juice? Thinking about my own juicing habits, I realized that I unconsciously follow a "quarter-cup rule." If I need less than a quarter of a cup, I squeeze the fruit by hand; more than that, I turn to technology for help.

I've taken a look at some of the most widely available products used for extracting citrus juice. Although you can spend \$500, even up to \$3,000 for a citrus juicer (check the *Frontgate* catalog if you don't believe me), I've kept my perusal to



**Practical and pretty.** A juicer with a strainer makes sense; just be sure that the strainer's holes are small enough to prevent the seeds from falling through.

those machines that ring up for \$125 or less—much less, in most cases.

**For total control, try a hand-held reamer.** Hand-held reamers have a handle attached to a ridged cone with a tapered tip. You press the tip into the flesh of a halved citrusfruit and then twist to extract the juice.

"With a reamer you can see if you're breaking into the rind," says reamer-fan Norman van Aken, the chef and co-owner of Norman's in Miami. The key flavor point for juicers is whether the juicer breaks into the skin, releasing potent oils that give the juice a more tangy—some would say bitter—flavor.

Reamers are inexpensive (under \$10), easy to store, and quick to clean. "When I'm done with the reamer, I just throw it into the sink," says van Aken. The downside of a reamer is that for large amounts of juice your hand will tire, so choose a model with a comfortable handle.

**Add a saucer and a strainer, and you've got the quintessential juicer.** This is the juicer your grandma used. The citrus half gets pressed onto the cone and turned by hand to extract its juice. Sunkist popularized this kitchen gadget when it launched its "Drink an Orange" campaign in 1916. As part of its promotion, the company began produc-



**Squeeze the handles of this Mexican press and juice pours from its perforated bottom.** One hint: the fruit goes in cut side down.



**Limes fit just fine in the lemon press but not vice versa.** Part of the fun is pulling out the doughnut-shaped lime after it's pressed.

ing its own line of glass reamers. Today, these reamer-saucers are made from all kinds of materials—plastic, ceramic, glass, metal—and have become quite the kitchen collectible. I particularly like a little metal one, available at most kitchen stores, that fits in a drawer and can take a beating (unfortunately, it's too small for a grapefruit).

**Metal hand-held presses are, well, handy.** When I saw the jaunty Mexican juice presses in a Williams-Sonoma catalog, I remembered Zarela Martinez, the chef-owner of Zarela's in New York City, telling me how these are among her favorite kitchen tools. There's a smaller green one for limes, and a larger—you guessed it—yellow one for lemons. When I squeezed limes with the green press, I fell in love. You put half of a lime, cut side down, in the perforated cap. Press the handles together to squeeze the cone onto the skin side of the lime. With a satisfying *pfffft*, every drop of juice gets squeezed out as the press inverts the lime.

I was a little less taken with juicing lemons this way. For starters, lemons are usually bigger, so you need two hands to bring the handles together to squeeze the fruit, and a lemon's thicker skin means you need to exert much more pressure. If your lemon has a little nubs on its bottom, it doesn't sit well in the cup, which

gives you less juice and often a squirt in the eye. (*Fine Cooking's* copy editor, who owns these presses, pointed out that she just cuts off those nubs before pressing.)

Aside from these painted presses, there are unpainted metal ones, such as the one featured recently in the *Sur la Table* catalog. The unpainted metal lime press costs \$10.95; the colored presses are \$15. None of the hand-held presses can hold an orange or a grapefruit, which is something to consider. But for limes the press works so well (and

## For big juicing jobs, you may want to bring on the big guns.

looks so good), I'd buy one just for making margaritas.

**Countertop presses offer plenty of psi, PDQ.** Smooth rack-and-pinion gearing, controlled by a lever or handle, exerts hundreds of pounds of downward pressure on a citrus half. Most of these kinds of presses, such as the OrangeX and the Chef's Juicer, both of which hover around the \$100 range, stand fairly tall, and are best suited to kitchens with plenty of counter space. The only short one I've come across is called the Mighty OJ, by Metrokane. It's about eight inches tall, has a charming rounded shape,

comes in myriad colors, and costs around \$50. (Be sure to shop around when buying juicers: there's a great disparity in price for the same model from catalogs, discount stores, and the Internet.)

What I like best about all these countertop juicers is that you can juice a lot of fruit quickly without the annoying whir of an electric motor. But they can split the fruit if you follow through too far with the handle, and they do require some effort. After juicing a cup of lemon juice with the OrangeX, I could feel my

triceps starting to burn. And danger looms: the heavy top on both the Mighty OJ and the OrangeX can fall onto your fingers if you leave it up; that has happened to me while cleaning the Mighty OJ, and I

can tell you it hurts. For that reason alone, I'd consider the Chef's Juicer, which has a spring-action handle with a swing-back mechanism that keeps the press from falling on careless fingers.

**Electric juicers are fastest and least painful.** An electric juicer may be the way to go if you drink a lot of juice. All the electric models I tested work basically the same way: you press a citrus half on a reamer, but instead of you turning the fruit, the reamer turns automatically. The most powerful one I tried, the 250-watt Waring Citrus Juicer (\$125), produced a cup of lemon juice about thirty seconds



faster than the fastest countertop press, and about a full minute faster than the reamers. (Of course, the amount of juice in each lemon will vary, so results will vary.) But where the electric models undeniably beat out the competition is in effort exerted, which is minimal.

You can get an electric model for as little as \$15, but you may not want to. The ones I tried in that range worked fine but had definite flaws. Farberware's Deluxe Citrus Juicer, for example, looks kind of cool and retro with its metal trim, and I liked how you can coil its excess cord neatly below the container. But its metal edges were sharp and the strainer didn't attach to the container smoothly. The inexpensive Krups Pressa Maxi went together better, but some juice would spray outside of the provided container, perhaps because its cone sits too high, or perhaps because the container isn't wide enough.

Though it won for speed and muscle, the Waring model, which is identical to the Waring-made juicer marketed as Acme, had an irritating high-pitched sound: something I wouldn't want to wake up to. And it doesn't come with a lid, which I found surprising. A lid seems a sensible, inexpensive feature for keeping out dust and whatever else might fall into the bowl while the juicer isn't running.

**My favorite of the electric models I tested was the Braun Citromatic de Luxe.** For a reasonable \$30, this one has it all. While its motor isn't as powerful as the Waring model, its sound wasn't nearly as annoying. It also comes with a lid, and its spout can be turned up so that juice doesn't drip onto your counter when you take the glass away. I also liked the unique design of its strainer, which is not only easy to clean because the pulp doesn't get stuck in it, but also keeps even the smallest bits of seeds from getting into the juice. (Pastry chef Melissa Murphy, owner of Sweet Melissa Pâtisserie in Brooklyn, New York, wisely points out that it's a good idea to strain juice from most electric juicers, even those that have a built-in strainer.)

**Appliance attachments are another option.** I didn't even think of this category until David Lebovitz, a pastry chef and author (who mainly uses his vintage glass reamer for juicing), mentioned that



**The tall and the short of it.** Countertop presses are the strong, silent types and work via rack-and-pinion gearing.

when he needs a lot of juice he turns to his Cuisinart food processor's citrus attachment. Cuisinart no longer makes the attachment for its larger models, but its Little Pro Plus comes with a citrus attachment. You can buy a citrus attachment for KitchenAid's food processors, as well as for its stand mixers. Since I already have a KitchenAid stand mixer, the attachment really appeals to me—I get the benefit of the mixer's powerful electric motor but with an easy-to-store, reasonably priced (\$25) attachment.

So with all these options, what's one to buy? If you have a household of fresh-squeezed-juice-drinking folks (or, come to think of it, if you have arthritis), by all means get an electric juicer or, for a quieter morning, one of the countertop presses. (One warning: if you like pulp, your choices will be more limited: the presses, the Braun, and the Waring strain virtually all pulp.)

But if you find, like I do, that you need more than a cup of citrus juice only three, maybe four, times a year, pocket the money, save the counter space, and give your hands an occasional workout with a reamer. On the other hand, if I had an electric juicer, maybe I'd be inclined to start my day more often with fresh juice.



**Lots of juice, little effort.** If you drink a lot of fresh-squeezed juice, consider an electric model; your hands will thank you.

*Joanne Smart doesn't mind squeezing the lemons for her favorite lemon-rosemary sorbet by hand; it strengthens her fingers for rock-climbing. She's an associate editor for Fine Cooking.* ♦



# Perfecting the Marriage of Pasta & Sauce

Consider the texture of the sauce and the shape of the pasta for a match made in heaven

BY LIDIA MATTICCHIO BASTIANICH



"The right sauce in combination with the right pasta creates gustatory magic," says Lidia Bastianich.



**For long, flat pasta, skip the colander.** Simply let the excess water drip back into the pot before adding the strands to the sauce. This keeps more of the pasta's starch intact, which can add body to a sauce.



**Tossing the pasta with the sauce—here a creamy sage sauce—is crucial for dispersing flavors.** To simply top plated pasta with sauce leaves you with an unevenly flavored dish.

Photos except where noted: Judi Rutz



Campanelle  
(bellflowers)

Farfalle  
(butterflies)

Gemelli  
(twins)

Fusilli  
(little springs)

Conchiglie  
(shells)

Castellane  
(castles)

Ruote  
(wheels)

## Short, tubular pastas

**Tubular pastas go well with sauces that are thick or chunky.** Keep the size of the ingredients in mind: tiny macaroni won't hold a chickpea, while rigatoni may feel too large for a simple tomato sauce, where penne would work better. Ridged pastas provide even more texture for sauces to cling to.

Ziti tagliate  
(cut ziti)

Tortiglioni  
(helixes)

Macaroni  
(elbows)

Cavatappi  
(corkscrews)

Rigatoni  
(thick ridges)

Ziti  
(bridegrooms)

Penne rigate  
(ridged quills)

Penne lisce  
(smooth quills)

## Shaped pastas

**Shaped pastas pair well with all kinds of sauces, but especially those with texture.**

Pieces of meat, vegetable, or bean are captured in the crevices of the pasta and nestle in the twists. The shapes also add some whimsy to the plate.

## Long, thin pastas

**Long, thin dried pasta, such as capellini, spaghetti, or linguine, marry best with olive-oil-based sauces.**

These long expanses of pasta need lots of lubrication. Oil coats the pasta completely without drowning it. Thicker strands, like fettuccine and tagliatelle, can stand up to cream sauces and ragùs. When cutting vegetables or herbs for long pasta, cut them string-like rather than in cubes to help them blend better.

Capellini  
(angel hair)

Spaghettini  
(thin spaghetti)

Spaghetti  
(little strings)

Spaghettoni  
(thick spaghetti)

Fusilli lunghi  
(long fusilli)

Linguine  
(little tongues)

Fettuccine  
(little ribbons)

Tagliatelle  
(cut ribbons)

**Y**ou may not think about it every time you open a box of pasta, but the shape you choose plays an important role in the outcome of the dish. The right shape can make a good sauce great; the wrong shape can dampen the appeal of even the best sauce.

Long or short, smooth or ridged, thick or thin, with or without curves and crevices, different shapes of pasta capture and absorb sauce differently. Matched correctly—rigatoni with a hearty sausage sauce—and you have a hit, a pleasing interplay between the texture of the pasta and the components of the sauce. In this case, the pieces of sausage are captured in the hollow of the pasta. Matched less well—the same meat sauce paired with capellini (angel hair pasta)—and you get the vague sense that something is wrong. I say vague, because this kind of mistake is not always apparent; the food may look good and smell good, but it just doesn't come together well. In the case of the capellini, the delicate noodles can't support the meat sauce, which gets left behind in the bowl as the pasta gets eaten.

Perfect pasta pairings—linguine and clam sauce, cavatelli and broccoli, ziti and meat sauce—have been a part of the Italian culinary repertoire for cen-

turies. The possible combinations of pasta and sauce—there are hundreds of shapes of dried pasta alone—are limitless and may even be a little intimidating when you start to think about it. But by following the suggestions listed alongside the pasta shapes above, your dish will be off to a sound start.

**You can be less particular when matching fresh pasta with sauces.** The nuances of shapes and texture are less pronounced in fresh pasta than in dried, and fresh pasta carries and absorbs any sauce more readily than does dried. Fresh pasta generally follows the same rules as dried: the flatter and longer shapes combine well with olive oil and cream sauces, while sturdier shapes, such as orecchiette, work well with chunkier and more assertively flavored sauces. Tomato and simple cream and butter sauces are universal and will go well with basically all pasta.

### Lubricate, don't suffocate, pasta

Pasta should be sauced immediately, while still hot, and judiciously, so it's not overwhelmed. I most often drain the pasta and return it to its cooking pot. Especially for tubular or creviced pasta, you want to be sure to drain it well or the excess water will keep the



**Quick-cooking capellini finishes cooking in the sauce.** This trick allows the pasta to absorb more of the sauce's flavor and works with any sauce that has ample liquid, such as this shellfish and tomato sauce.

sauce from adhering to the pasta and may also dilute the flavor of your sauce. I add a ladleful of the sauce and toss to see that the sauce gets an initial even distribution, and then I top or toss the pasta with enough remaining sauce to thoroughly coat it but not so much that the pasta swims in a pool of it.

For long, but not tubular, pasta, where there's no risk of water hiding out in it, I simply lift the pasta out of its pot with tongs, let it drain briefly over the pasta pot, and then add it to the sauce. This keeps the pasta's starch intact, which can add body to your sauce. This method works especially well with thin capellini, which is easy to overcook. I take it out of the boiling water while it's still a touch on the stiff side and let it finish cooking in the sauce.

### Serve pasta pronto

What is of utmost importance in serving pasta is that the pasta is served hot. Warmed bowls will help keep it that way. I like to pile the pasta into a mound in the center to keep it warmer longer and so I don't lose my sauce to the side of the plate.

In Italy, cheese is used with pasta very selectively—it's not offered with seafood pastas for example—and with careful attention paid to timing. Toss it with the pasta at the last minute, after removing the pot from the heat. Otherwise, the heat will cause the proteins of the cheese to separate from the fat, and you might end up with a serving spoon filled with stringy cheese and oily pasta. To add the classic final touch, grate or shave a little extra cheese over the plated pasta. The steam of the pasta will lift and intensify the aroma of the cheese.

## RECIPES

### Capellini with Shellfish, Haricots Verts & Tomatoes

*Haricots verts* are slender, young green beans. If you can't find them, substitute regular green beans but slice them lengthwise. Serves four.

24 littleneck clams, scrubbed and rinsed  
 ¼ cup olive oil  
 ½ lb. large sea scallops, halved or quartered depending on their size  
 6 cloves garlic, crushed  
 2 cups cored, peeled, and crushed plum tomatoes or 1 can (28 oz.) Italian plum tomatoes (I like San Marzano brand), drained, seeded, and crushed  
 ¼ tsp. dried red pepper flakes  
 1 Tbs. salt  
 ¼ lb. *haricots verts*, trimmed  
 1 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley  
 ½ lb. dried capellini or linguine

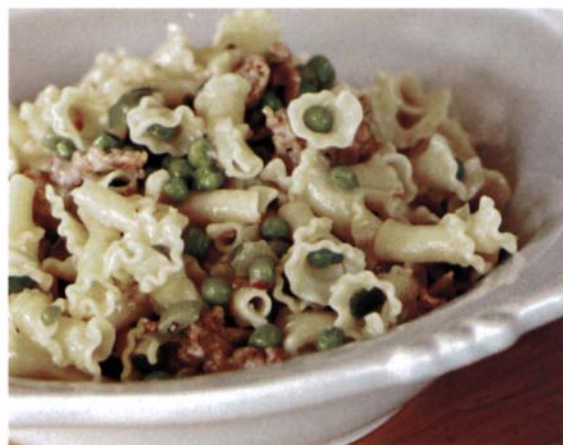
Put the clams and about ½ cup water in a medium skillet. Cover and steam over high heat until the clams open, about 2 min. Discard any that don't open. Remove the clams and reserve. Strain the liquid from the pan and reserve. In the same skillet, wiped dry, heat 2 Tbs. of the oil over high heat. Add the scallops and sear on both sides until lightly browned, about 2 min.; remove and reserve them. In the same skillet, heat the crushed garlic in the remaining 2 Tbs. oil until lightly browned. Add the tomatoes and red pepper flakes and simmer over moderate heat for 15 min.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of water to a boil and add the salt. Add the *haricots verts* and cook until just tender; remove with a slotted spoon and add them to the tomato sauce. (Keep the water boiling.) Add the scallops, the clams, and the strained clam liquid to the tomato sauce and cook until the sauce is slightly reduced, about 3 min. Stir in the parsley.

While the sauce reduces, stir the pasta into the boiling water and cover until the water comes back to a boil. Uncover and cook until the pasta just starts to become pliable but is still somewhat firm, about 2 min. With tongs, lift the pasta, let it drain for a moment over the boiling water, and add it to the sauce, tossing well, to finish cooking. When the pasta is *al dente*, transfer the pasta and sauce to a warm serving platter or individual bowls and serve immediately.

### Campanelle with Sausage & Leeks

For this sauce, you want a short, shaped pasta with crevices to catch the pieces of sausage and peas.



**Peas play hide and seek in curly campanelle pasta.** Tubular and creviced pastas are wonderful for capturing bits of chunky food.



Campanelle are also called riccioli. Serves six.

**Salt**

**2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**

**¾ lb. sweet Italian sausage (casings removed), crumbled**

**2 large leeks, trimmed, light green and white parts cut into ½-inch pieces, washed well, and drained**

**1 Tbs. finely chopped shallot**

**2 Tbs. unsalted butter**

**1 cup frozen young peas, defrosted and drained, or 1 cup fresh peas, blanched in boiling water for 2 min.**

**1 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock**  
**Freshly ground black pepper**

**1 lb. campanelle or other shaped, dried pasta**

**½ cup freshly grated *parmigiano reggiano*; more for serving, if you like**

Bring a large pot of water to a boil; add about 1 Tbs. salt. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Cook the sausage, breaking up the lumps, until golden, about 5 min. Add the leeks and cook, stirring, until soft, about 8 min. Stir in the shallot and cook for 1 min. Add 1 Tbs. of the butter, the peas, and the stock. Heat to a boil, reduce the heat to medium low, and simmer gently for 5 min. Season with salt and pepper, cover the skillet, and set aside; keep warm.

Meanwhile, cook the campanelle, stirring occasionally, until *al dente*, about 12 min. Drain the pasta and return it to the pot over low heat. Add the sausage and leek sauce to the pasta and toss well. Remove the pot from the heat, add the remaining 1 Tbs. butter and the grated cheese; toss well. Transfer to a warmed serving platter or individual bowls. Serve immediately, with more grated cheese on the side, if you like.

### Fettuccine with Creamy Sage Sauce

Cream sauces go well with all kinds of pasta shapes, but I especially like how this sauce holds up to a hearty flat ribbon pasta. *Ricotta salata* is a smooth, firm, pure-white Italian sheep's milk cheese. *Ricotta affumicata* is a lightly smoked version of the same cheese. Both are available at specialty grocery stores, cheese shops, and Italian groceries. If you can't find them, increase the amount of *parmigiano reggiano*. Serves two as main course; four as an appetizer.

**Salt**

**8 Tbs. unsalted butter, cut into pieces**

**8 large, fresh sage leaves**

**1 cup heavy cream**

**½ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**½ lb. dried fettuccine**

**¼ cup freshly grated *parmigiano reggiano***

**2 oz. *ricotta salata*, preferably smoked (*ricotta affumicata*), cut into thin shards with a vegetable peeler or on the side of a box grater**

Bring a large pot of water to a boil; add about 1 Tbs. salt. In a large skillet, combine the butter and sage. Stir over low heat until the butter has melted. Add the cream and stock and bring to a boil; cook until the mixture lightly coats the back of a spoon, about 3 min. Season with salt and pepper. Remove the sauce from the heat but keep it warm.

Meanwhile, cook the fettuccine until *al dente*, 10 to 12 min. With tongs, lift the pasta from the pot, let it drain for a moment over the boiling water, and then add it to the sauce in the skillet. (Alternatively, drain the pasta in a colander and add it to the sauce.) Cook gently on low for a few minutes for the pasta to absorb the sauce. Remove the pasta from the heat and stir in the grated cheese, and season amply with pepper. Serve in warmed bowls topped with the shaved ricotta.

### Fusilli with Fresh Spinach & Ricotta Cheese

Fusilli works best here, but a short, ridged pasta like penne rigate would also work well. Serves six.

**Salt**

**¾ to 1 lb. young spinach, trimmed, washed, and dried well**

**2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**

**4 small scallions, chopped**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**1 cup ricotta cheese, preferably fresh**

**1 cup half-and-half or light cream**

**Pinch nutmeg (optional)**

**1 Tbs. unsalted butter**

**1 lb. dried fusilli**

**½ cup freshly grated *parmigiano reggiano***

Bring a large pot of water to a boil; add about 1 Tbs. salt.

Stack several leaves of spinach at a time and cut them crosswise into ¼-inch strips. You should have about 8 packed cups of shredded spinach.

In a very large pan, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the scallions and cook, stirring, until softened, about 5 min. Stir in the spinach and a pinch of salt and pepper into the pan. Cover and steam the spinach until it's wilted but still bright green, about 5 min., stirring as needed to cook the spinach evenly.

Meanwhile, in a small bowl, stir together the ricotta, half-and-half, and nutmeg, if using, until smooth. Stir the ricotta mixture and the butter into the spinach and season with salt and pepper. Reduce the heat to medium low and simmer for 5 min.

Meanwhile, stir the fusilli into the boiling water and cover the pot. When the water returns to a boil, uncover the pot. Cook the pasta, stirring occasionally, until *al dente*, about 12 min.

Reserve ½ cup of the pasta cooking liquid. Drain the pasta well and return it to its pot over low heat. Add the spinach mixture and enough of the reserved cooking liquid to make a sauce that lightly coats the pasta. Toss thoroughly. Remove the pot from the heat and stir in the grated cheese. Transfer the pasta to a warm serving platter or individual bowls and serve.

*Lidia Matticchio Bastianich is the chef and co-owner of three New York City restaurants, including Felidia. She recently won the James Beard Award for best New York City chef. ♦*



**Strands of spinach wrap themselves around fusilli in a perfect pairing of shape and sauce.**

The same sauce paired with say, spaghetti, would look and taste different; the spinach would simply slide off the skinnier, slicker pasta.


# Balsamic

# Vinegar is Italy's Famed Elixir

More like wine than vinegar, genuine *balsamico* gets complex flavor from lengthy aging in lots of wood

BY PAUL BERTOLLI

Everyone who loves to eat has experienced a private moment of awe over some particular food or drink. Such moments refuse description—it's impossible to reduce to words a perfectly ripe pear, the luscious synthesis of a slow-cooked braise, or vintage wine that has found its way to fullness. We're first riveted by the utter singularity of what we sense; then we're caught up in a complex archi-



"Aged balsamic vinegar tastes like time itself," says Paul Bertolli.

## Making balsamic vinegar takes a lot of time, many barrels,



A *balsamico* battery consists of three to fourteen barrels.

Genuine balsamic vinegar results from two fermentations: alcoholic and acetic. The first is a slow fermentation of *mosto cotto* (cooked grape juice); this produces alcohol and leaves some sugar. What follows is a second fermentation, in which

alcohol created by the yeast is further transformed into acetic acid by *aceto* (or vinegar) bacteria. The residual sugar, in combination with the acetic acid, accounts for the sweet-sour makeup of balsamic vinegar. One mystery of balsamic

vinegar making is the ability of yeast and vinegar bacteria, normally antagonistic to one another, to exist side by side in the developing *mosto cotto*. This coexistence has never been duplicated in the pure environment of a laboratory.

1. The grapes, traditionally Trebbiano, as well as Lambrusco or other lesser-known varieties, are picked as ripe as weather permits. The grapes are gently crushed, pressed, and passed through a coarse



A barrel from author Paul Bertolli's own battery.



texture of taste. We praise the gardener, cook, or winemaker, and rightly so, but what caused our reaction can really only occur at the hands of nature, under the sealed lid of the braising pot, or by the secret alchemy of time.

The first time I tasted real aged balsamic vinegar, I felt awe. I was asked to extend my hand to form a well between my thumb and wrist. Into this crevice my host poured several heavy drops of a dark, shiny syrup as thick as molasses from a small, heavy flask. What began as a simple contrast between sweet and sour deepened into penetrating layers of flavor that mingled the aromas of wood and cooked fruit, harmoniously balanced on a taut line of acidity. From there it moved into a more evocative dimension that sent me on a goose-chase for descriptors—cedar chest, dried fruit, stewed cherries, tobacco, but also something more mysterious and hard to describe, for aged balsamic vinegar tastes of time itself.

### Not everything labeled balsamic vinegar is the real thing

Before it was introduced to the American market in the late 1970s, balsamic vinegar was known only to those who might have had the chance to hear of it or taste it on their travels through the Italian cities of Modena or Reggio Emilia and the surrounding countryside. Balsamic vinegar's roots go back to antiquity. In the Emilia-Romagna, it remained a guarded family tradition that existed well outside of commerce. Today there's hardly a supermarket that doesn't carry on its shelves at least half a dozen brands of balsamic vinegar in a confusing variety of

shapes, sizes, prices, and claims of vintage. Because there are no U.S. standards of identity for balsamic vinegar, both the imported and domestically produced ones vary widely in their approximation of the real thing.

### An Italian treasure controlled by law

Standards adopted and administered by consortia in Modena and Reggio Emilia govern every aspect of how the vinegar is produced and aged, including bottle shape and even the foil that covers the cap. Here's the lowdown on what you'll find here in America, from the real article to good imitations.

**True balsamic vinegar wears the name Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Modena or di Reggio Emilia** on the label. *Tradizionale* is the key word here. It must be aged for a minimum of twelve years in wooden casks and be approved by master tasters. Small bottles of *tradizionale* balsamic vinegar start at about \$75 and go upwards of \$400.

**Condimento** balsamic vinegar made in the traditional method offers the best value. Producers who either live outside Modena and Reggio Emilia or who have decided to release their products without consortium approval make the second category of balsamic vinegar. Such products are often grouped under the name *condimento balsamico* but may bear other names such as *salsa balsamica* or *salsa di mosto cotto*. These vinegars may be produced and aged according to the identical standards of a *tradizionale* outside the zone or released prior to twelve years and so do not qualify. Prices for these vinegars can be good and are the best value for the



**Condimento-grade balsamic is made in the traditional way but doesn't bear the stamp of consortium approval.**



**Paul Bertolli draws a sample from his battery.**

## and a little mystery

sieve, the juice left to settle briefly before being transferred to a large open kettle.

2. Impurities are combed away and discarded. The juice is simmered between 180° and 195°F for 24 to 42 hours. (If it gets too hot, the sugar will caramelize, blocking fermentation, and an unpleasant, scorched taste will result.)

3. Reduced by roughly half, the *mosto cotto* is removed from the kettle, cooled, and transferred to holding tanks for fermentation and then to barrels.

4. Wooden barrels are essential to balsamic vinegar's flavor. Built in decreasing volumes

from about 100 to 10 liters, the casks are arranged in a series called a battery. Most producers use a variety of woods, including oak, chestnut, mulberry, ash, cherry, juniper, and sometimes other fruitwoods. Each cask is filled to about 80 percent of its capacity, and porous cloth is draped over the large, square opening. The large opening encourages evaporation, feeds the aceto bacteria which need oxygen to convert alcohol to vinegar, and guarantees a concentrated result over time.

Environment is an indispensable aspect of the pro-

cess. Traditionally, barrels are stored in a clean, drafty attic so the vinegar is exposed to wide fluctuations in temperature (in the Emilia-Romagna, often-torrid summers alternate with frigid winters). Balsamic vinegar is a living substance responsive to the seasons.

5. Topping-up of the barrels happens once a year. In general, starting with the smallest barrel, as much vinegar as is necessary to restore the previous year's level (which decreased through evaporation) is taken from an adjacent larger cask; the level of this cask is in turn restored by a

nearby cask, and so on down the line. The largest cask is topped with the fermented, acidified *mosto cotto* of the new vintage. The vinegar grows denser as it ages and travels down the series, while the various woods contribute aromatic complexity. The vinegar is eventually drawn from the smallest cask in the battery.



## Balsamic vinegar buying guide

Here are some reliable brands available in the U.S. For where to buy, see Sources on p. 83.

### The real thing

Consortium-approved, genuine balsamic vinegar (*Aceto Balsamico di Modena* or *di Reggio Emilia*)

- ♦ Carandini, 250ml, \$169
- ♦ Cavalli, 125ml, \$172
- ♦ San Geminiano, 100ml, \$135
- ♦ Pier Luigi Sereni, 400ml, \$140

Genuine balsamic vinegar that isn't consortium-approved (*condimento balsamico*, *salsa balsamica*, *salsa di mosto cotto*)

- ♦ Carandini, 250ml, \$18
- ♦ Cavalli, 500ml, \$33
- ♦ San Geminiano Estate, 250ml, \$53

- ♦ Pier Luigi Sereni, 250ml, \$20
- ♦ Vecchia Dispensa, 250ml, \$19

### The imitations

Imitation balsamic vinegar is worlds away from the depth, intensity, or complexity of *condimento*- or *tradizionale*-grade balsamic vinegar, but it can be just fine for a weeknight vinaigrette. We tasted eleven supermarket-shelf brands and found a few that were adequate. But we had to admit: after tasting the real stuff, it was hard to go back.

- ♦ Monari VSOP, 250ml, \$10.99
- ♦ Sclafani, 500ml \$7.59
- ♦ Monari blue label, 250ml, \$4.69
- ♦ Lina, 500ml, \$2.89

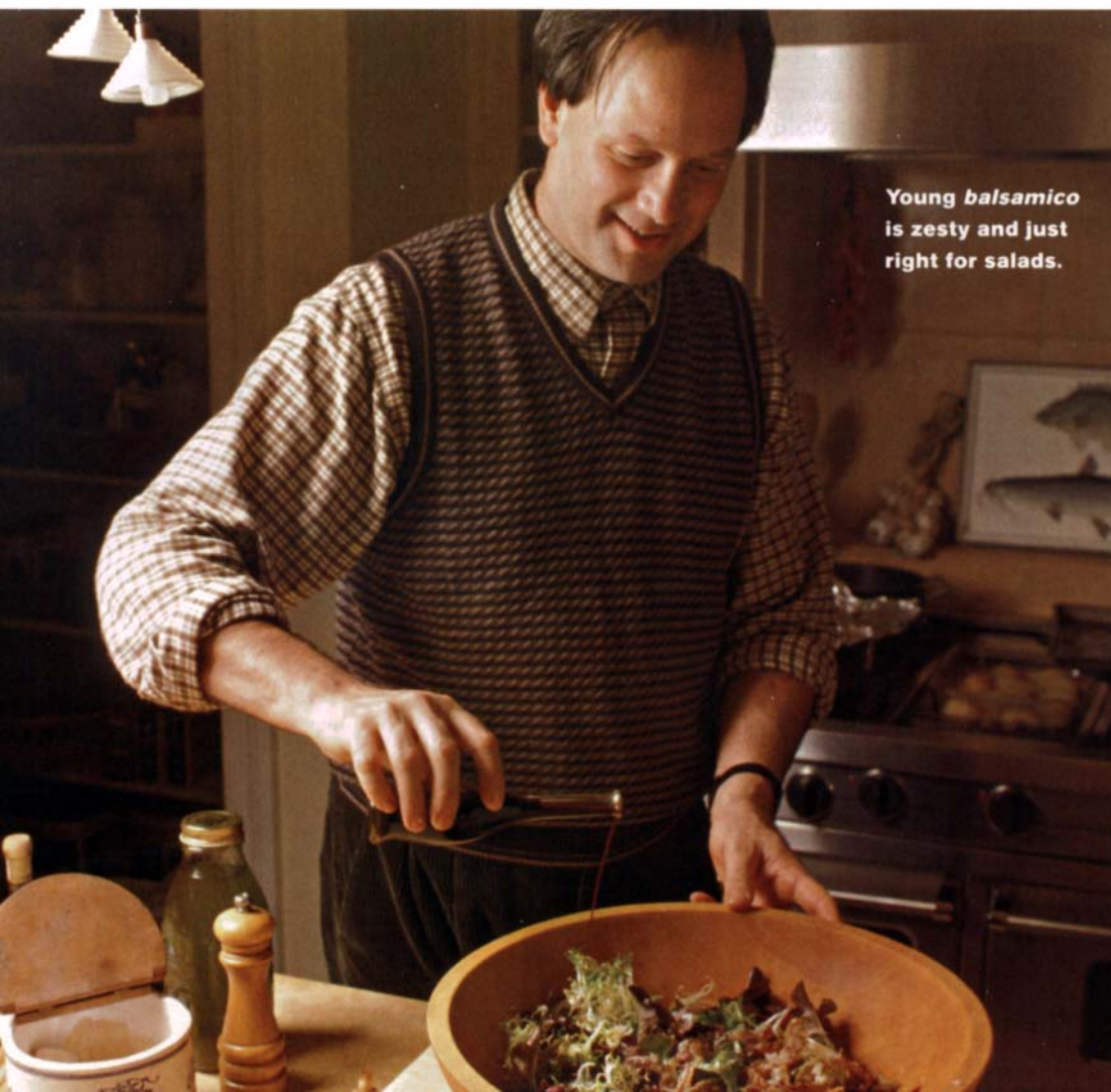
—The editors

savvy consumer. Unfortunately, there's no guarantee on the bottle, but some makers of *tradizionale* also release *condimento*-grade balsamic vinegar.

In contrast to *tradizionale* is *Aceto Balsamico di Modena*, which is essentially an imitation of *tradizionale*. It may or may not undergo two complete fermentations, may or may not be aged in wood, and doesn't undergo lengthy aging. Often it's a concoction of concentrated grape juice mixed with strong vinegar and caramel coloring. Most balsamic vinegars available in America fall into this category. The packaging, which frequently includes fancy bottle shapes, sealing wax, claims of age, and images of dusty dukes, often promises more than it delivers. In fairness, not all are bad, but the best way to judge is by tasting. See the sidebar at left for recommended brands.

### Balsamic vinegar in the kitchen

My friends in Italy have taught me how to think about balsamic vinegar in the kitchen. Cooks and devotees use both *condimento* and *tradizionale*, and they often speak of three general weights of vinegar: young (three to five years old), middle-aged (six to twelve years old), and the very old (twelve years and



## Young or old,

High-quality balsamic vinegar, whether young or old, is best enjoyed simply. Here are some ways to try it.

- ♦ Whisk young balsamic vinegar with shallots, extra-virgin olive oil, salt, and pepper.

Toss the vinaigrette with a salad of radicchio, frisée, arugula, dandelion greens, crisped pancetta, and toasted walnuts; top with thin shards of aged Parmesan.

- ♦ Spoon old balsamic vinegar over pears baked in simple syrup and accompanied by a dollop of fresh sheep's milk ricotta cheese.

- ♦ Drizzle a teaspoon of extra-old balsamico over aged beef tenderloin that has been seasoned with salt and pepper and seared in a cast-iron skillet.

- ♦ Drizzle middle-aged balsamic vinegar over risotto made with leeks, white wine, turkey stock, and Parmesan just before serving.



up, sometimes as old as 150 years). Balsamic vinegar is always a blend of the new and the old; vintage designation does not apply to balsamic vinegar the way it does to wine. If a year is marked on the bottle, it refers to the year that the barrel battery was started.

**Italians call young balsamic vinegar with pronounced acidity *da insalata***—vinegar to be used with oil as a salad dressing; or for *pinzimonio*, a vinaigrette used as a dipping sauce for raw vegetables. Each diner improvises his own *pinzimonio* from cruets of balsamic vinegar, olive oil, salt, and pepper in the middle of the table. Young balsamic vinegar is also used to spike pan sauces and marinades.

**Middle-aged balsamic vinegar is a more viscous vinegar.** Italians call it *medio-corpo*, and this medium-bodied vinegar is used to add finesse to sauces and braises at the end of cooking, to give dimension to risotti and pasta dishes, and to enhance mayonnaise and other sauces.

**Very old vinegar is called *extra-vecchio*, and affectionately, *il patriarca*.** It possesses flavors, texture, and complexity that only very long aging can confer. *Extra-vecchio* ennobles just about any food deserving of its company. It would be a waste to mix

very old balsamic vinegar with other ingredients or to pair it with highly spiced foods or complicated flavors. Its sapid perfume is best released on warm or at least room-temperature foods. It stands best alone and reveals its full potential used sparingly on unadorned prime cuts of beef, fish, poultry, or veal. It's delicious on sautéed liver—foie gras and old *balsamico* is a glorious combination; still, you won't be disappointed if you substitute fresh calf's liver or even duck or chicken. Unmarinated wild game is particularly well suited to a few drops of old balsamic vinegar—loin of fresh venison, pigeon roasted pink. So is wild duck, as well as choice cuts of fish such as tuna, halibut, or sole. Certain fruits in their prime of ripeness deserve balsamic vinegar's benediction—pears, wild strawberries, and peaches are exquisite, as are mild, creamy cheeses such as fresh ricotta. Perhaps the best way to enjoy old balsamic vinegar is to pour yourself a thimble glass full after dinner and savor it all by itself.

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*Paul Bertolli, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, makes balsamic vinegar in Sonoma County. He's the chef and co-owner of Oliveto in Oakland, California.* ♦

## high-quality balsamic vinegar is best used simply

**Old balsamic vinegar makes a syrupy accent for ripe pears.**



**Middle-aged balsamic vinegar adds fragrance to risotto or pasta.**



**Use extra-old balsamic vinegar as a simple yet complex sauce for beef filet.**



# Baking Light and Flaky Croissants



Robert Jörin shows off his award-winning croissants—puffed, flaky, and golden brown.

A “laminated” pastry dough—with less butter than you’d expect—gives this classic pastry its irresistibly flaky texture

BY ROBERT JÖRIN

My childhood memories of growing up in the Swiss Alps include waking up each morning to the sweet, yeasty aroma of bread, Danish, and croissants drifting into our house above my parents’ bakery. Since then I’ve made thousands of croissants—at my own bakery in Petaluma, California, and teaching at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in the Napa Valley—but I got the chance to get really obsessive about creating the tastiest, best-looking ones while preparing for this year’s Coupe du Monde de la Boulangerie (World Cup of Baking) in France.

During the year-long preparation for the competition (where my team won first place), I refined a recipe for light, flavorful, flaky croissants—the best I’ve ever made. The keys are a pre-fermented dough (also called a sponge), fresh top-quality butter, working the dough on a cool surface, and rolling, turning, and cutting the dough precisely.

## A pre-ferment enhances flavor

Croissants belong to the family of doughs called laminated doughs because you’re actually layering, or laminating, butter between sheets of dough when you make them. Depending on the number of turns—the process of folding the dough and butter layers over themselves—laminated pastry can have



## Mix the pre-ferment



In a mixing bowl, stir the warm water and yeast together. Wait for them to foam, about 2 minutes. Add the flour and mix on low speed for 3 minutes with a mixer (or for about 5 minutes by hand). The dough will be sticky and somewhat lumpy. Cover and let rest at room temperature (75°F) for 12 hours, until tripled in bulk.

## Make the dough and give it a rest



In a small pan or bowl, combine the water and milk. Pour the liquid into a large mixing bowl and add 1 teaspoon of the sugar. Sprinkle the yeast over the warm liquid, stir to dissolve, and let sit until it starts to foam, about 2 minutes.



Add the flour, the remaining sugar, the salt, and the softened butter, along with the pre-ferment, and mix. If using a stand mixer, knead with the dough hook, stopping to push the dough down the hook. Knead until the dough pulls into a translucent sheet without tearing, about 12 minutes. (If working by hand, knead for about 15 minutes.) The dough will be soft and supple.

many, many layers. When they're baked, laminated doughs rise because the moisture in the dough turns to steam. The steam, trapped between layers of butter, makes the dough layers puff up. (I've heard theories that it's the moisture in the butter that causes the steam, but because you can make good puff pastry with shortening, which contains no moisture, I've concluded that the moisture in the dough is what causes steam.) The result is a delicate dough with buttery layers and a remarkably flaky texture that shatters with every bite.

**A pre-ferment needs a head start.** This croissant recipe differs from traditional formulas because I'm using a pre-ferment, also known as a sponge, which I make the night before and let rise for twelve hours. It's a lot like the technique used for sour-dough breads, where a fermented starter gets added to the final dough. The pre-ferment gives the yeast time to flourish and multiply, which gives good rise and added flavor to the finished croissants.

**Great croissants need great butter.** In addition to the pre-ferment, it's butter, of course, that gives croissants their unforgettable flavor and texture. For a lighter result, I've developed a recipe that's only 25 percent butter in relation to the final dough, which is much less than what's traditionally called for (croissant recipes can consist of anywhere from

30 to 60 percent butter). I'm not anti-butter by any means—after all, I'm a pastry chef—but thanks to the complex flavor that the pre-ferment provides, I can get away with using less, which makes for a lighter, less greasy result.

But—and that's a big but—butter still plays a crucial role in making delicious croissants, and it should be the freshest and the best-quality butter you can get. I like to use a European-style butter, such as Plugrà, made here in America, or Président, made in France. These are more pliable than other butters, and they give great flavor to the finished croissants.

### Use a heavy rolling pin and a chilly countertop

Both the butter and the dough must be well-chilled so the dough doesn't get sticky or slippery as you roll and turn it. A cool kitchen and a cool work surface are essential.

◆ **Use all-purpose unbleached flour.** There's no reason to use imported. I've had good results with Giusto's, King Arthur, and Cook brands.

◆ **A chilled countertop helps prevent butter melt-out.** If you don't have a stone countertop or if your kitchen is especially warm, set ice packs or a baking sheet filled with ice on your counter to keep it as cool



Transfer the dough to a large, lightly oiled bowl and cover with plastic. Let rise at room temperature (avoid a drafty place) until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.

## Roll out the dough



On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough into a 12x14-inch rectangle that's ½ inch thick.



Transfer the dough to a baking sheet, brushing off any excess flour. Cover it with plastic and put it in the freezer until it's as firm as chilled butter, about 30 minutes.

as possible before rolling out the dough. (Be sure to wipe off any condensation before you start working.)

♦ **A large, heavy, ball-bearing pin makes quick work of rolling.** The weight of the pin makes it much easier to roll out buttery doughs quickly.

♦ **Pounding butter makes it more pliable.** I use a simple tapered rolling pin to pound the butter into a 12x7-inch rectangle that's uniformly thick all over and half the size of the dough into which I'll be rolling it (see the photo above right). Again, I like European-style butter, which is more pliable after you pound it and doesn't crack when you roll it. (Lower moisture and higher butterfat make butter less apt to break during rolling.)

### **Turning creates layers; precision keeps them even**

When rolling and turning the dough, you'll need to work quickly to prevent the butter in the dough from softening too much. If the dough is getting very soft, lay it on a baking sheet and refrigerate it for 15 minutes or so to firm up. If the dough has

hardened too much during chilling and begins to break during rolling, leave it out for 10 minutes or so to soften.

**To maintain square angles and even edges,** periodically switch from rolling vertically and horizontally and roll diagonally from the center out toward the four corners. Work on a lightly floured surface and use a pastry brush to sweep excess flour off the top of the dough as you roll it.

**To ensure even layers of pastry,** take the trouble to even out edges and line them up squarely each time you fold the dough. Otherwise, some areas will have fewer layers than others and the croissants won't rise properly.

**For optimal lift and flakiness, I do three turns,** which, for a recipe containing this amount of butter, is just right (with laminated doughs, the more butter you use, the more turns you need to make). A finished pastry with too few turns will have large, uneven layers and the butter will melt out during baking. Too many turns will destroy the layers: the butter will become incorporated into the dough, and



## Pound the butter to make it pliable



Five minutes before the dough is finished chilling, lay the cold butter between layers of plastic wrap or freezer bags. With a rolling pin, pound the butter into a 12x7-inch rectangle that's uniformly thick. Even out and square up the rectangle with your fingers and a dough scraper.

## Seal in butter that's cold yet pliable



On a lightly floured surface, position the pounded butter on one side of the dough rectangle, lining it up parallel with the edges and leaving about  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch margin. Fold the rest of the dough over the butter.



Pinch the edges to seal in the butter. Fold the pinched edges over.

you'll end up with croissants that aren't as flaky and nicely risen as you want them to be.

After each turn, wrap the dough in plastic and put it in the refrigerator to rest. I like to make a small indentation with my finger to remind me of how many turns I've done and how many are left to go.

Until you get used to it, this dough can be hard to handle—it's quite elastic and the butter can melt through the layers as you work—so you may want to roll out half at a time before cutting and shaping. After completing the turns and letting it rest, cut the folded dough in half lengthwise. Roll each half into a  $9\frac{1}{2}$ x25-inch strip. Position the two strips as shown on p. 65 and proceed as directed.

**Shaped croissants begin with precisely cut triangles.** To roll, you'll start with the base of the triangle, folding it and then rolling it toward the tip. It's key to position the rolled croissant so that the triangle tip is under the roll and the roll's lines appear to converge toward you. You'll then curve the roll toward you (croissants curved the wrong way may unfurl during baking). *(Continued)*

## Roll out to laminate the dough



Position the dough rectangle with the folded edge away from you. Roll the dough into a 10x20-inch rectangle that's  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick.

## Fold and roll three times to make flaky layers



Fold the other third over the two layers, brushing off flour as needed. Press an indentation in the dough after each turn to remind you how many turns you've made (at this point, just one). Wrap the dough in plastic and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to let the gluten relax and the butter firm up.

Fold one-third of the dough toward the center, brushing off excess flour as you go.

### Freeze shaped croissants to bake them fresh in the morning

Mixing the dough, making the turns, and shaping the croissants does take a bit of time, and you have to spread the process out over several hours to let the dough firm up and to let the gluten relax between the steps.

Don't worry, though, about keeping crack-of-dawn baker's hours to serve these delicious croissants in the morning. I usually make the pre-ferment on the first day, mix the dough, make the turns, and shape the croissants on the second day, and bake them the morning of the third day. I shape and egg-wash the croissants, arrange them on a baking sheet, stash them in the freezer, and then cover them with plastic wrap after they've frozen a bit, which keeps the wrap from sticking to them. The night before I want to bake them, I defrost them, uncovered, in the refrigerator. The next morning, I let them rise until almost doubled in bulk (one to two hours) at room temperature before baking.

## RECIPE

### Croissant Dough with Pre-Ferment

*Yields 20 croissants.*

#### FOR THE PRE-FERMENT:

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup warm water (100°F)  
 $\frac{1}{8}$  tsp. active dry yeast  
 9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour

#### FOR THE FINAL DOUGH:

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup warm water (100°F)  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup milk  
 6 Tbs. sugar  
 2 packages active dry yeast  
 (4½ tsp. total)  
 11¼ oz. (2½ cups) all-purpose flour  
 1 Tbs. salt  
 1¾ oz. (3½ Tbs.) unsalted butter, completely softened at room temperature  
 10 oz. (20 Tbs.) unsalted butter, chilled

#### FOR THE EGG WASH:

1 large egg, a pinch each of sugar and salt added, beaten

For the method, review the text and follow the photos and captions starting on p. 61.



*Robert Jörin and the American team took first place at 1999's Coupe du Monde de la Boulangerie in Paris. Robert teaches at the Culinary Institute of America's Greystone campus in St. Helena, California. Sue Ann Scheppers Wercinski, a graduate of the CIA's baking program and a freelance food writer, assisted him in writing this article. ♦*



## Repeat the rolling



Remove the dough from the refrigerator, position it horizontally, and roll it out to a 10x20-inch rectangle. Fold, rewrap, and chill as before. Repeat this sequence once more. Let the dough rest for ½ hour before rolling it into a 19x25-inch rectangle that's ⅛ inch thick. Trim ragged edges and slice the dough in half horizontally, leaving both halves in place.

## Measure and cut triangles



On the upper edge of the top strip, measuring from the left corner, cut small notches every 4½ inches. On the lower edge of the bottom strip, do the same thing. With a pizza cutter and a ruler, connect the upper left corner of the top strip to the first notch on the bottom strip. Continue, making parallel diagonal lines. Now connect the lower left corner of the bottom strip to the first notch on the top strip to cut a triangle; continue until you end up with 20 triangles and some scraps. Cut a small notch in the middle of each triangle base and dab the three corners with egg wash. The notch helps the rolled croissant curl into a crescent.

## From the triangles, roll the crescents



Starting at the base of the triangle, pull gently so the notch separates. Fold the base over twice, ½ inch each time, pinching as you go.



Roll towards the tip with your dominant hand, pulling gently at the tip with your other hand. Finish the roll so that the tip is underneath the croissant. Turn it so that the lines of the roll converge toward you, and set the croissant on a parchment-lined baking sheet; leave at least 1 inch between croissants.



Gently curve the ends of each croissant together toward you, pinch, and brush the croissants with egg wash. (If you're freezing the croissants, do it now.) Let them rise uncovered at room temperature until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour. Heat the oven to 375°F. Bake the croissants in the hot oven for 18 to 20 minutes or until golden brown. To check for doneness, push gently on the inner curve of the croissant. If it springs back, the croissant is thoroughly baked.



# Toasted Hazelnut



**Worth every minute in the kitchen.** This dessert isn't quick, but it's do-ahead and incredibly delicious.

**Trace the pan for a useful template.** Piping the ladyfingers within the lines makes them neat and easy to handle.



This classic French dessert is making a comeback; delicate ladyfingers and a deep chocolate, truffle-like filling are the reasons why

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

I studied pastry in Paris in the early 1980s, and I took my culinary education very seriously: I religiously sampled every dessert that the city had to offer, which is quite a few. I'm still holding on to a few of those extra pounds today, but more important, I'm holding on to the memory of my favorite of those many desserts—Marquise au Chocolat, that satiny-smooth, deep chocolate confection, usually made in a loaf shape and often edged with tender ladyfinger cake. The dessert is a real mainstay of the classic repertoire, but I've noticed it showing up recently on menus of several trendsetting restaurants.

Over the years I've been refining and adjusting the recipe for marquise to get it just how I like it. I came to realize that marquise isn't really one dish, but rather three separate components: a rich chocolate truffle-like filling, delicate ladyfingers, and a coffee-infused cream. Each component has its own quirks and technical challenges, and each component is crucial to the delicate balance of power.

## Give classic ladyfingers a crunchy twist

Traditional marquise recipes call for vanilla-scented ladyfingers, but I like to add toasted, ground hazelnuts for the subtle flavor and the nubby texture they add to the delicate fingers.

The cake batter is based on a classic French *biscuit*, which means the yolks and whites are beaten separately (as opposed to a *génoise*, in which whole eggs are whipped to the ribbon stage). The ladyfingers get their spongy lift from a bit of baking powder and perfectly whipped egg whites. If the whites are too soft, your batter will be runny and impossible to pipe (as well as pancake-flat after bak-



# and Chocolate Marquise

Whip whites and yolks separately to just the right stage



**Ladyfingers need loft**, which comes from whipping eggs and sugar to a precise consistency—whites (above) to medium-firm peaks, yolks (right) to the ribbon stage.



ing). If the whites are too firm, they'll become grainy and lose volume and you'll also get flat ladyfingers.

## Make a template for easier piping

The ladyfingers are the outer garment for the marquise so they need to be precisely the right size, attractive, and with no gaps between them. I've learned not to make individual ladyfingers but to make "pre-fab siding" using a template. Tracing the sides and bottom of the pan on a piece of parchment consolidates the work to one baking sheet. It also eliminates the guessing game of how many ladyfingers I'll need to line the pan. The photos on pp. 66 and 68 show how I mark the template and pipe the sides.

**Do your homework—prepare that mold.** Recipes always tell you to prepare your pan before starting to make the batter, and in this case, you really need to obey the directions. Once the filling is made, it must go in to the mold immediately or it may start to separate or harden as it cools. I suggest lightly greasing or spraying the mold and lining it with plastic wrap. This keeps the marquise fresh and makes unmolding a breeze.

## Use fresh eggs and splurge on the chocolate

The chocolate filling uses four yolks that don't get cooked, so you should scrupulously check for freshness and cracks. If you see any cracks, don't use that egg and select another one. Once the yolks are separated, keep them chilled until just before mixing. If you prefer not to eat raw egg yolks, you might try *Fine Cooking* contributing editor Shirley Corriher's method for "pasteurizing" them. Combine the four yolks with  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of the cream and 1 teaspoon of the sugar from the recipe in a small saucepan. Stir over very low heat, scraping constantly to avoid lumps. If the yolks start to thicken, pull the pan from the heat and dip it in cool water. Continue like this until the yolks have been heated for about 4 minutes. As long as the temperature was at least 140°F (very hot tap water), any salmonella bacteria that may have been present will be killed. Now use the yolks in the recipe as directed.

**Select the chocolate carefully for this dessert**—after all, it's the star. I use a fine-quality bittersweet like Valrhona or Callebaut (see Sources, p. 83, for buying information). Scharffen Berger is a rela-

**Want to see this in action?**

Check out our video on making a marquise on *Fine Cooking's* web site: [www.finecooking.com](http://www.finecooking.com)



**Folding is not the same as stirring.** Use a lifting and rolling motion to blend the mixtures without deflating them.

tively new premium brand you should look for, and Lindt is often sold in the grocery store and is fine in a pinch. The extra-smooth texture and slightly bitter tone of premium-quality bittersweet chocolate is a nice contrast to the buttery filling. A quick note here on the difference between bittersweet and semisweet: In general, bittersweet is less sweet than semisweet, but there are no industry standards, so one brand's bittersweet may be about as sweet as another brand's semisweet. Just taste and choose what you like—either will work fine in this dessert.

### **Learn to control the textures**

When making the filling, the goal is a perfectly blended, perfectly smooth, dense but creamy mixture, like the center of a truffle. The way to get that is to have all the filling ingredients at exactly the right stage. Begin by melting the chocolate and keeping it warm. If the chocolate is too cool when you add it to the butter and sugar, the mixture will harden when you add the cream. The whipped cream itself really just wants to be whipped until it thickens slightly—you're looking for body, not volume here.

Next, check that the unsalted butter is just barely soft. It should still be cold and give just slightly when pressed with your thumb. I combine the butter and superfine sugar with the paddle, not the wire whisk. I want the ingredients to blend but not to aerate.

### **Serve it up, with a new kind of sauce**

The final component of the dessert is the sauce. You might be tempted to overlook this part, but I find that a little drizzle and pooling of this luscious sauce bring all the elements together.

**Piping the panels takes patience.** Guide the bag with your dominant hand while squeezing the top of the bag gently with the other one.



Tradition calls for a cooked egg and cream sauce, *crème anglaise*. But my friend Steve Hunter suggested using a simple cream reduction that's lightly sweetened and flavored with espresso powder. It can be made two days ahead, and the results are so spectacular that I've never used anything else since he gave me the idea. Adding a split vanilla bean while reducing the heavy cream is a more traditional flavoring and equally yummy, too.

Finally, pay close attention to the slicing technique (see the photo on p. 71). A well-sliced marquise makes a beautiful presentation. I always say that "the eye is the first to feast" (much to the mirth of the *Fine Cooking* staff. I guess I say it quite





often...but it's *true*). The marquise is easiest to slice when cold, but I think it tastes better at cool room temperature—smooth textures, mellow flavors—so you can slice and plate it up to about an hour before serving, just before you serve the first course of your holiday dinner.

## RECIPE

### Toasted Hazelnut Chocolate Marquise

If you can't find superfine sugar in the grocery store, whiz regular granulated sugar in the food processor for about 1 minute. *Serves ten to twelve.*

#### FOR THE LADYFINGERS:

- 3¼ oz. (¾ cup) all-purpose flour
- 1 oz. (⅓ cup) very finely chopped toasted hazelnuts
- ¼ tsp. baking powder
- 4 large eggs, separated
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ½ cup sugar
- Pinch salt
- 2 Tbs. finely chopped toasted hazelnuts and
- 1 Tbs. sugar mixed together, for sprinkling

#### FOR THE CHOCOLATE FILLING:

- 10 oz. good-quality bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 1¼ cups heavy cream
- ⅔ cup superfine sugar
- 1 Tbs. Frangelico (hazelnut liqueur) or 1½ tsp. vanilla extract
- 10 oz. (20 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened
- 1½ oz. (½ cup) unsweetened cocoa powder, sifted if lumpy
- 4 large egg yolks

#### FOR THE COFFEE CREAM SAUCE:

- 3 cups heavy cream
- 2 to 3 Tbs. sugar
- 1 tsp. instant espresso (or coffee) powder; more to taste

**Pre-fab sides are a cinch to fit.**  
Just slide the cake panels into the plastic-lined mold.



**Well-baked ladyfingers** are slightly dry outside, spongy inside.





**To make the ladyfingers**—Heat the oven to 350°F. Fit a large pastry bag with a plain #7 tip (about ½ inch). Line a large baking sheet with parchment. Set a 10½x5½x3-inch loaf pan on one of its longer sides on the top part of the parchment. Trace the edge with a pencil. Move the pan down about 2 inches and trace the side edge again. Move the pan down another 2 inches and set the pan right side up. Trace the bottom. Flip the paper over.

In a small bowl, combine the flour, hazelnuts, and baking powder with a whisk until well blended. Put the yolks in a large bowl of an electric mixer, fitted with a whisk attachment if you have one. Add the vanilla and beat on medium-high speed until foamy. Gradually add all but 2 Tbs. of the sugar while beating. Continue beating until the mixture is pale yellow and tripled in volume. When the whisk is lifted, the mixture will fall back into the bowl and form a ribbon; it should linger a bit on the surface. Set aside. In a clean bowl with a well-cleaned whisk attachment (or beaters), add the whites and the salt. Beat on medium speed until the whites are frothy and have doubled in volume. Gradually add the remaining 2 Tbs. sugar and beat on high speed until the whites form medium-firm peaks. With a large spatula, scoop about a third of the whites into the yolk mixture. Gently stir until just combined. Add half of the remaining whites and

carefully fold in. Sprinkle half of the flour mixture over the surface of the yolk-white mixture and fold in with a couple of gentle strokes. Fold in the remaining whites. Sprinkle the remaining flour over the top and gently fold in.

To pipe the ladyfingers, scoop the batter into the pastry bag using deep, cutting strokes to prevent the batter from deflating. Twist the top of the bag closed. Hold the bag about 2 inches above the parchment-lined sheet. Gently squeezing from the top, pipe the batter into short, thin strips just barely touching each other and keeping within the template. For optimum lightness, let the batter fall gently from the bag and finish each ladyfinger with a small lift of the wrist. You should have about 10 ladyfingers on the bottom template and about 12 for each side. Remember to stop between ladyfingers and twist down the top of the bag to keep the batter flowing smoothly. You'll have a little extra batter; pipe more ladyfingers for a snack, but bake them after the first batch is done.

To bake the ladyfingers, sprinkle the hazelnut and sugar mixture over the tops of the ladyfinger strips. Bake until puffed and the tops are golden brown, 15 to 18 min. Slide the parchment onto a cooling rack and cool until just barely warm, about 15 min. Carefully peel the strips from the parchment, keeping the rows intact. Let cool completely.

**Don't go for volume.** Just give the cream a quick whip to add body, not air.



**Cocoa cloak.** A strategically placed towel prevents a flurry of cocoa.

**Double shot of chocolate.** After the cocoa comes melted chocolate. Using both gives the marquise smooth texture and deep flavor.







**Don't stop to lick the spoon. Fill the mold quickly before the mixture sets.**

**To line the mold**—Lightly grease or spray the mold and line with two long sheets of plastic wrap to cover the bottom and sides. Set the bottom row of ladyfingers into the pan, topping side facing down. It should be a snug fit. Next, lean the two remaining rows against the long sides, topping side facing out. Again the fit should be snug. Don't worry if they peek above the sides of the pan—you'll trim them later.

**To make the chocolate filling**—Melt the chopped chocolate in a double boiler or microwave and set aside. Don't do this too much ahead—you'll want to use it while it's still warm. In a large bowl, combine the heavy cream,  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup of the superfine sugar, and the Frangelico. Beat until lightly whipped, about 1 min; the mixture should be thickened but not enough to hold soft peaks. Set aside. In a large bowl of an electric mixer, beat the butter and the remaining  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup superfine sugar on medium speed with the paddle attachment (or beaters) until well blended and almost smooth. Don't worry if some sugar grains linger. Add the cocoa powder. Mix with slow pulses, stopping to scrape down the sides, until blended. Add the egg yolks one at a time, beating well before adding the next. Check the temperature of the melted chocolate; it should still be warm. If not, set it over simmering water until warm. Pour it into the cocoa mixture and beat on low speed until well blended. Remember to scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl. With the mixer on low, slowly drizzle in the cream, stopping a few times to scrape down the sides. Stop as soon as the cream is mixed in.

Using a large rubber spatula, pack the filling into the ladyfinger-lined pan. Cover the surface with plastic wrap and fold the remaining plastic over the filling and the ladyfingers. Refrigerate until the filling is firm, at least overnight or up to 3 days.

**To make the coffee cream**—In a medium saucepan, bring the heavy cream to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer vigorously until the cream is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon (you'll have about

2 cups), about 10 min. Remove from the heat and whisk in the sugar and espresso or coffee powder until dissolved. Taste and adjust. Cover the surface with plastic wrap and chill until ready to serve.

**To serve the marquise**—Peel the plastic away from the surface. Using a serrated knife, trim the ladyfingers down to the level of the filling. Invert the marquise onto a flat platter and tug on the plastic to release the marquise from the mold. Remove the plastic. Using a serrated knife, cut through the ladyfingers, down to but not into the filling. Run a sharp, thin knife under very hot water and wipe it off. Immediately cut down through one slice and lift the knife directly back up. Repeat, using both knives and heating the thin one for each slice. Serve with the coffee cream.

*Abigail Johnson Dodge is Fine Cooking's test kitchen director and the author of Great Fruit Desserts. ♦*

**A serrated blade cuts the cake without tearing. Use a thin, straight knife to cut through the filling.**



**A slice of chocolate bliss.** A simple coffee cream sauce adds another layer of texture and a bittersweet flavor note to the marquise.



## Filling a pastry bag without making a mess

Using a pastry bag to pipe beautiful cookies, meringues, and decorations will go much more smoothly if you first fill your pastry bag properly. Start by selecting a bag that's larger than you think you'll need. Good all-purpose sizes to buy are 10- and 12-inch bags. (The small cake-decorating bags sold in kits are really only useful for small tasks, like writing.) Then follow the directions for filling at right. To learn how to use a pastry bag to pipe ladyfingers, see "Toasted Hazelnut & Chocolate Marquise," p. 66. A future column will cover other piping techniques.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. ♦



**1** Twist the bag just above the tip and stuff the twisted part into the tip. This keeps any mixture from coming out while you fill the bag.



**2** Hold the bag loosely about halfway up, and with your other hand, fold back the top of the bag to form a large cuff or collar.



**3** Using a spatula, scoop up the mixture and plop it into the pastry bag. Scrape the spatula against the cuff to remove excess. Continue until the bag is half full. (Don't overfill: the mixture would soften from the heat of your hands before you finished piping).



**4** Unfold the cuff, twist the bag above the mixture to close it, and untwist the tip end. Before you begin piping, hold the bag over the bowl and twist the top to force the mixture all the way to the tip to eliminate any air bubbles. Squeeze until a few inches of the mixture push through the tip.

## Heavy cream vs. whipping cream

I used to think that heavy cream and whipping cream were the same product simply marketed under different names. Now, after a bit of research and a few tests in the kitchen, I've learned that there are differences—albeit slight—between these two types of cream.

Heavy cream is the richest type of liquid cream with a fat content of at least 36% (one local dairy I spoke to produces its heavy cream at 39%), while whipping cream contains between 30% and 36% fat.



In general, the more fat in the cream, the more stable it will be for whipping and for saucemaking. For whipping, you need a minimum of 30% fat. While both whipping cream and heavy cream whip up quickly, I did discover that whipped cream made with whipping cream was softer, more voluminous (25% to 30% more), and more enjoyable

spooned on top of desserts. The whipped cream made with heavy cream was more dense and firm—making it a good choice for piping through a pastry bag.

In saucemaking, the minimum amount of fat required to prevent cream from curdling when boiled with acidic and savory ingredients is 25%, so again both creams qualify. Heavy cream, however, has the advantage here since it is a bit more unctuous and requires less time to cook down to thicken and enrich a sauce.

The final difference is that heavy cream has 5 more calories per tablespoon than whipping cream, and it costs 5 to 10 cents more per pint.



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# Add Zing with Zest



**T**hough I use citrus zest all year long, I really appreciate its cheerful color and flavor during winter. Whether grated or cut into strips, the colorful outer peel of a lemon, lime, orange, or grapefruit brightens all kinds of dishes, savory and sweet.

**A more complex flavor than juice.** While citrus juice, especially lemon juice, has an important place in cooking and baking, it's a bit of a one-note wonder. I get more excited about the volatile and aromatic oils found in the skin of the fruit, which contain floral and tangy tones as well as a slight, sophisticated bitterness. I almost always add a bit of zest even if a recipe calls for juice only; zest underscores the citrus flavor and announces its presence both visually and texturally. In sweets, zest adds a colorful counterpoint to fresh berry fillings, dried fruit compotes, suave custards, and creamy frostings. Mellowed when baked, it insinuates its sunny personality into cakes and cookies. In savory dishes, a sprinkling of grated zest can brighten a rich stew, perk up a salad, and add zing to a stir-fry or vegetable sauté.

**All citrus fruits are candidates for zesting.** Lemons are the most popular. The zest from tangerines or blood oranges offers exquisitely flowery aromas. Grapefruits yield a wonderfully complex zest. Lime zest loses some of its kick when cooked, but added just before freezing to a sorbet or granita, it can't be beat.

## First step: scratch and sniff

A vividly colored peel is usually, but not always, an indication of flavorful zest. Look for firm fruit whose skin is clear of soft spots. I also try to buy organic produce when possible, especially citrus, since I'm using the outside of the fruit.

**The more fragrant the fruit, the more flavorful the zest.** Scratch the peel of the fruit you're considering to release some of the volatile oils in the skin. It should fill your nose with a wonderful bouquet. If the aroma is dull, skip that fruit and pick another.

**Wash citrus before zesting.** If you've ever tried to zest a lemon and watched the zester skim the fruit without grabbing the skin, the lemon was probably coated with wax. (Many fruit packers coat citrus with an edible wax to

maintain freshness.) To get rid of the wax, scrub the citrus briefly under warm water.

## Zest with a light hand

The first zesting tool that comes to mind is called, appropriately, a zester. The five-holed tool removes only the top layer of the peel in thin strips—good to festoon desserts and salads. These delicate strips can be chopped and minced with a knife.

A channel knife gives you a single, thicker strip of zest, great for garnishing because you can twist it decoratively. But because the tool cuts deeper, you'll get more pith.

For really wide strips—great for infusing sugar syrups and marinades—use a small, sharp knife or a vegetable peeler, and then scrape away any pith you might accidentally peel off. Before using the strips, crush or twist them lightly to release some of the fragrant oils. Resist grating or cutting too deeply when re-

moving the zest, since the white pith underneath is unpleasantly bitter.

**A new kitchen tool lets you grate zest with ease.** Finely grated zest has always been a difficult chore because much of the zest gets clogged up in the small holes and valleys of the grater. Now a wood-working rasp has been adapted for kitchen use. Marketed as the Microplane (see Sources, p. 83), this tool offers a more efficient way to get zest without pith.

**Zest just before using.** Zest's volatile oils are strongest just after zesting, so use the zest right away. It's much easier to zest a whole fruit than one that's been cut, so zest before you juice. In fact, make a habit of zesting a little of all the citrus you use so you can add a little if your dish or batter or salad tastes lackluster: zest may just be the pick-me-up it needs.

Robert Wemischner wrote *The Vivid Flavors Cookbook* and is the co-author of *Tea Cuisine*, a forthcoming book exploring the culinary uses of tea. ♦

## Experiment with zest

- ♦ Roasted red peppers tossed with olive oil and balsamic vinegar are nothing new—until you add a sprinkling of orange zest.
- ♦ Make gremolata—the classic garnish for *osso buco*—by mincing together lemon zest (and orange zest, if you like), parsley, and garlic. Use it to boost the flavor of sautéed chicken or fish.
- ♦ Create your own “signature” cured olives by combining kalamata olives with some grated orange zest, rosemary, and crushed hot red or black pepper.
- ♦ Add grapefruit zest to an avocado and tomato salad; it may sound odd, but it complements the flavors perfectly.
- ♦ Make a compound butter by adding citrus zest, freshly cracked black pepper, and dry mustard to softened butter. Chill and use to top off a grilled steak or fish fillet.





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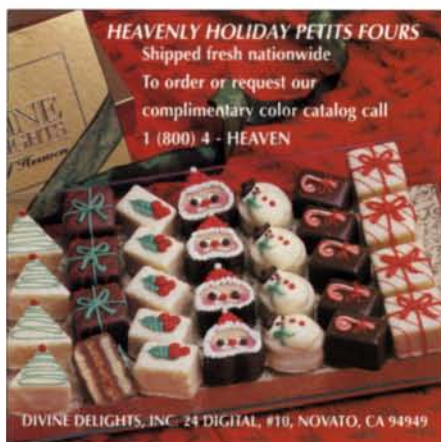
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# Learn how to control crystallization for successful sweets

**W**hether tempering chocolate, making caramel, or churning ice cream, cooks need to be masters of crystals. When tempering chocolate, you need to get the cocoa butter to set in just the right crystalline form to give chocolates a firm, shiny surface. When freezing ice cream, you need baby-fine crystals for that velvety-smooth, melt-in-your-mouth sensation.

For candymakers especially, crystallization—or the lack of it—can be the undoing of a hard day's work. Sometimes you need to prevent crystallization (when making brittle or caramel, for example), and other times you need to encourage the right kind of crystals to form. For candies like fudge, divinity, taffy, and pralines, you want a lot of tiny crystals so the candies will be smooth and creamy, yet still firm. For rock candy, however, a few very large crystals are what you want.

What are crystals, and how do they form? Crystals are the solid form of many food substances. Salt and sugar are two examples. Another familiar crystal is ice, the solid form of water. When these substances are heated or dissolved in a mixture, their molecules move about randomly. But as the molecules of a substance cool and slow down, they join together in a precise formal pattern unique to that substance. For the crystal to form, each

**These candies are distinguished by their sugar crystals: smooth fudge (tiny crystals); coarse rock candy (large crystals); hard peanut brittle (no crystals).**



molecule must be in exactly the right place.

To encourage crystal formation, you need to create the right environment. First, you need a very concentrated mixture of the substance. Second, the temperature must be low enough so the molecules are moving slowly. With very closely packed, slow-moving molecules, you can sometimes trigger crystal formation by just stirring the mixture, causing the molecules to bang into each other. By manipulating concentration and temperature, you can control the size and number of crystals to get better results in your caramel, pralines, brittles, and fudge.

## **Sugar concentration affects candy's firmness**

A high concentration means a lot of molecules squeezed

very close together. In candy-making, you can increase the concentration of sugar molecules by boiling the sugar syrup. The longer you boil, the more water evaporates and the higher the sugar concentration becomes.

If you've made candies before, you know that you start out by boiling a sugar mixture until it reaches a certain temperature, which the recipe specifies. The recipe might also give a descriptive term, such as soft-ball or hard-crack stage, which refers to how the syrup will behave when dropped in very cold water. These temperatures and terms are actually just another way to express sugar concentration. Pure water boils at 212°F at sea level (at higher altitudes, water boils at lower temperatures). When a mixture has

less water and more of another substance, such as sugar, the mixture boils at a higher temperature. Thus, a sugar mixture's boiling temperature tells us how concentrated it has become.

**For firmer candies, the concentration, and therefore the temperature, must be higher.** A higher concentration means there will be more sugar molecules to go around once crystallization starts, giving you a harder or firmer candy. If you make a candy and it doesn't firm up (crystals do not form), it probably means the sugar concentration was too low. The solution is to boil the sugar mixture to a higher temperature, which means you'll eliminate even more water and thus increase concentration. Usually if you boil the mixture 3 or 4 degrees



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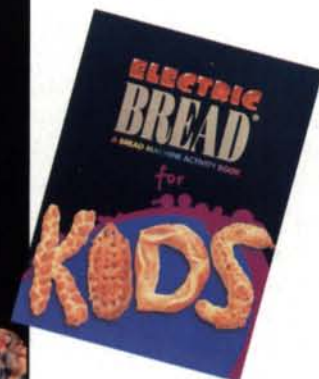


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## How to use crystals to control candy texture

Type of crystal	Result	How to accomplish
numerous, small crystals	creamy, smooth candy for fudge, praline, fondant	boil the mixture to high temperature for high concentration, let cool slightly, and then stir constantly and vigorously
fewer, large crystals	chunky texture for rock candy; can also lead to grainy candies (usually not desirable)	boil the mixture to high temperature for high concentration, agitate the mixture while still hot
no crystals, or slower crystal formation	caramel sauce or brittles, or for slowing crystallization for smoother candies	add corn syrup or a mild acid like lemon juice, vinegar, or cream of tartar to the mixture to interfere with crystallization

higher than the first attempt, the candy will work.

### A cooler temperature produces smaller, more plentiful crystals

When a mixture is hot, its molecules are moving very fast; as the mixture cools, the molecules slow down and it's easier for them to join. Cooling plays an important role in determining the number and size of crystals that will ultimately form, and that affects the texture of the final candy.

As I stated earlier, when you make candy, you first have to increase the concentration and the temperature of the sugar syrup so the molecules are packed close enough together. If you agitate the mixture slightly at this high temperature, whether by shaking the pan or even by just removing the thermometer, any undissolved sugar crystals on the side of the pan or on the thermometer could drop into the mixture. These few crystals (called "seed" crystals) would quickly attract more molecules and grow into big crystals, and the candy would be grainy. On the other hand, if you let the mixture cool undisturbed, the molecules

will have slowed down considerably. If you stir vigorously at this point, you'll get millions of baby crystals all at once. The more crystals that form, the smaller they will be (because there are fewer remaining free molecules to go around), and the smoother and creamier your candy will be.

So, the key to smooth yet firm fudge, pralines, and fon-

other factor that can influence crystallization: the purity of the mixture. Impurities in the mixture can inhibit crystal formation. One method to slow down or even completely prevent crystallization in candies is to compromise the mixture's purity by adding a similar but slightly different sugar to the mix. When the mixture is very concentrated and

## For smaller crystals and a smoother texture, allow sugar syrup to cool slightly before stirring it.

dant is to first bring the mixture to a high enough concentration and then let it cool off somewhat before starting to stir. And once you do start to stir, stir fanatically and without stopping for the finest, creamiest texture.

### To hinder crystallization, add another substance

In addition to concentration and temperature, there's an-

other factor that can influence crystallization: the purity of the mixture. Impurities in the mixture can inhibit crystal formation. One method to slow down or even completely prevent crystallization in candies is to compromise the mixture's purity by adding a similar but slightly different sugar to the mix. When the mixture is very concentrated and

which is sucrose. Another option is to add a mild acid, such as a few drops of lemon juice or vinegar or a pinch of cream of tartar. Acids will break down some of the sucrose in table sugar into glucose and fructose, so there will be three different sugars present, and crystals will not form as easily.

You can use this method of adding similar but different sugars to have more control over candymaking. With small amounts of another sugar, you can slow down (but not completely prevent) the formation of crystals, helping to make many candies smoother (by giving you more time to stir and create more crystals in the mixture). Every year around the holidays, a friend of mine cooks up a double batch of my pralines. A single batch of this recipe produces wonderfully smooth pralines without any corn syrup, but once the recipe is doubled, crystallization occurs faster than my friend can spoon up all the candy. By adding a tablespoon of corn syrup to the ingredients, she can slow down crystallization long enough to let her spoon up all the candies before they get grainy. Keep in mind, though, that small amounts of different sugars make it more difficult to get crystals, so if you do decide to take this approach, it may be necessary to take the mixture to a higher temperature (and higher concentration) for the candy to set up.

*Shirley O. Corriher, a food scientist, wrote CookWise: The Hows & Whys of Successful Cooking (William Morrow), which won a James Beard award in 1998. She is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦*



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# Expert Cooks Roll Out Eight New Cookbooks

There's nothing more exciting than watching a seasoned cook let loose creatively. And this fall, we can all watch—and learn from—the best, with eight new cookbooks showing experts at the top of their fields performing innovative culinary moves. Whether you want to challenge yourself with new techniques or you're simply interested in honing your skills, there's a cookbook here for you—or for a friend.

Some of the best of these innovative volumes are baking books, like *Butter Sugar Flour Eggs*, by Gale Gand, Rick Tramonto, and Julia Moskin (the former two are the chef-owners of Tru and Brasserie T restaurants in Chicago, the latter is a food writer). Ingeniously, each chapter focuses on a single ingredient (hence the title) and opens with an expressive text (“Like an apple-cheeked American girl, fruit is wholesome, but highly sensual”).

This personal book showcases many of Gand's childhood favorites, like the Roasted Peanut Ice Cream she first made at camp. Some of the recipes, such as Farmhouse Cheddar with Oven-Dried Apples & Toasted Pumpkin Seeds, are purely sophisticated inventions;

others, such as Strawberry Shortcake with Brown Sugar & Sour Cream and pillowy Cinnamon-Chocolate Scones, are riffs on old-fashioned favorites. Many of these homey recipes, like Oatmeal Lace Cookies and Butterscotch Pudding, would be perfect to make with kids. This cleanly designed, compact book (most recipes are on one page) is black and white, with an insert of color photos.

*Alice Medrich's Cookies & Brownies* offers a more instructional take on baking. Medrich (author of the luxurious *Cocolat*) has packed her new book with techniques. A clear introduction answers such questions as “How soft is softened butter?” (pliable but not squishy), and each chapter starts off with tips that Medrich picked up while experimenting (chocolate chip cookies baked directly on a pan rather than on parchment paper will be crisper). I'm eager (not to mention curious) to try Medrich's technique for making brownies with a creamy center by plunging the pan into ice water right out of the oven.

There's much more to this book than technique, though, as the recipes themselves are flavor-packed winners. The Espresso Walnut Cookies are

perfect butter cookies: brittle and a touch sandy, with a great coffee taste. This little book (7½ inches square) is whimsically illustrated and includes 25 color photos.

Madhur Jaffrey, the author of numerous cookbooks—most of them focusing on Indian food—is almost overwhelming in the cultural thoroughness in her latest book, *Madhur Jaffrey's World Vegetarian*. The more than 750 recipes here hail from practically every country in the world, including Trinidad (Fry Bake, a Creole bread), France (French Omelet with Herbs), Italy (Penne with Artichokes & Peas), Mexico (Refried Beans) and even the U.S. (Corn Bread with Sesame Seeds). Saffron transforms a yogurt, walnut, and eggplant dip from Iran into a smooth revelation, and Everyday Moroccan Bread is simple enough—yet unusual with its fennel and sesame seeds—to become an everyday occurrence in my kitchen. Many of these recipes are quick to prepare, so you can experience exotic flavors on weeknights; others require more time but not much more effort.

You'll find more casual food in Alice Waters's *Chez Panisse Café Cookbook*, which draws from the low-key café arm of her restaurant in Berkeley, California. This food illustrates Waters's usual perfect pitch in combining the best ingredients, with a special emphasis on the organic. Baked Goat Cheese with Garden Lettuces has been on the café's menu every day since it opened, and for good reason. While many restaurants now offer this dish, Waters' rendition should be considered the master recipe. The goat cheese contrasts a soft center with a crunchy breadcrumb crust, and the mesclun is perfectly dressed. Tuna Dumplings with Currants & Pine Nuts make the formula for meatballs new with chopped fresh tuna and Sicilian flavors.

The fish and seafood section of the book is particularly tantalizing, with recipes like Baked Scallops with Prosciutto & Meyer Lemon Relish and Baked Pasta with Sardines & Wild Fennel. With this and the other six cookbooks by Waters and the Chez Panisse staff, the restaurant is proving to be an excel-





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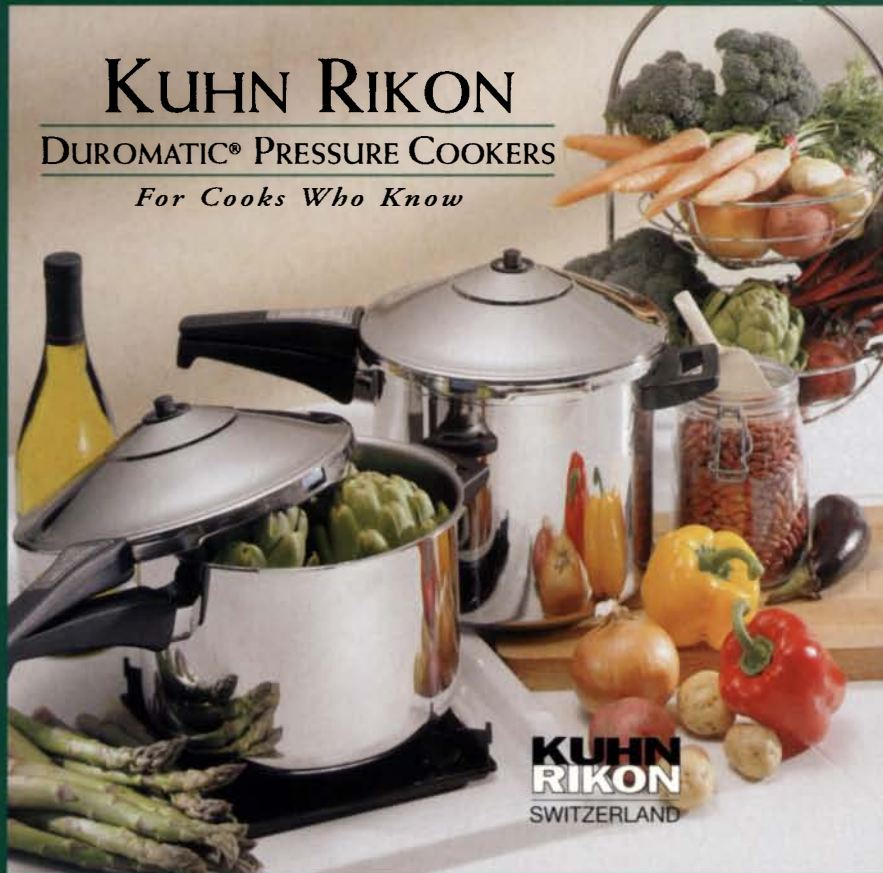


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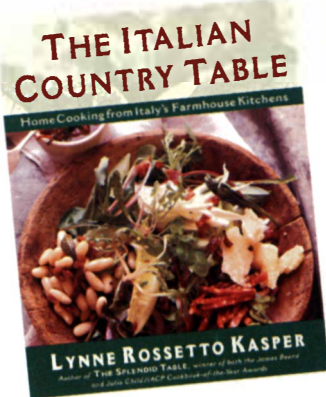
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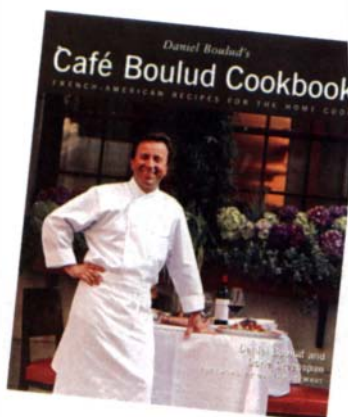
lent source for inspiring recipes. And the books themselves, with beautiful illustrations by David Lance Goines and top-quality paper stock, are a pleasure to read.

Lynne Rossetto Kasper's *The Italian Country Table* is another new cookbook with gutsy flavors and well-written recipes. Kasper's *The Splendid Table*, on the foods of Italy's Emilia-Romagna region, is one of my favorites, and I like *The Italian Country Table* even more. Besides skillfully collecting and organizing rustic food from Italian home cooks, Kasper writes beautifully.

Kasper's recipes are full of surprises, like the cornmeal in a soft chocolate cake or the pistachios she uses in a variation on Trapani's almond pesto. After Crusty Potatoes with Wilted Arugula brown in a skillet, the pan gets deglazed with white vinegar, adding a novel tang.

Surely it's not a surprise that an Italian whiz like Kasper has a practiced hand with pasta. One standout is Siracusa Market Pasta with olives, orange zest, and hot pepper; it makes a satisfying one-dish meal. This book is a more manageable size than *The Splendid Table*, yet it still includes a good section on sources for ingredients and travel information.

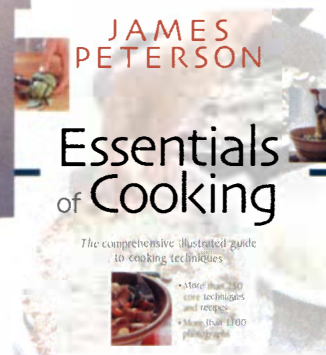
Daniel Boulud is a French chef who has now been cooking in the United States—at his New York City restaurants



Daniel and Café Boulud—for as long as he cooked in France, and his food reflects the interplay of European tradition and American ingenuity. Organized into four loose sections (traditional, seasonal, international, and vegetarian), *Daniel Boulud's Café Boulud Cookbook* claims to be geared to home cooks, but it doesn't veer far from the labor-intensive French restaurant tradition. To prepare tasty Morels & Pea Shoot Gnocchi in a Light Broth according to Boulud's instruc-



If *The Café Boulud Cookbook* doesn't challenge you sufficiently, you'll want *The French Laundry Cookbook*. It attempts to replicate the recipes used at Thomas Keller's famed Napa Valley restaurant (Susie Heller and Michael Ruhlman collaborated), with fabulous yet frustrating results. Pros: The rich, complex, recipes (White Corn Agnolotti with Summer Truffles; Five-Spiced Roasted Maine Lobster with Port-Poached Figs; and the "Yabba Dabba Do," a rib steak served with chanterelle mushrooms, pota-



format, the book is a keepsake on its own—for the living room or the kitchen.

*Fine Cooking* contributing editor James Peterson's newest book, *Essentials of Cooking*, will help you utilize all of the above books. It consists mainly of instructions (including 750 step-by-step photographs) for everything from making applesauce in a food mill to removing marrow from bones—a total of 100 "indispensable" skills. Thanks to Peterson, I've reformed my wasteful strawberry hulling ways (I now pare away a cone of white flesh rather than lopping off the leaves and some fruit) and I can better separate the grapefruit sections for Boulud's dessert. Peterson's book also contains recipes, although with proportions, not amounts, of ingredients. Using his methods, I produced carrot flans and slow-baked tomatoes. These worked perfectly in terms of technique, but tended toward blandness. That's because Peterson means his recipes to serve as guidelines that you can use to exercise your own creativity, as all the best cooks do.

See Sources, p. 83, for more information on these books.

## The pros share advice on everything from crisper cookies to authentic Italian farmhouse cooking.

tions, I detached the tiny leaves from 5½ ounces of pea shoots and dirtied more pots than necessary. Ruby Red Grapefruit with Pomegranate Sabayon is delicious: astringent yet sweet; however, like several recipes in this book, its title is a misnomer (the sabayon contains no pomegranate). Still, I can forgive Boulud and his co-author, Dorie Greenspan, for small imperfections in light of enticing recipes for Asian-influenced pork, salad with tapenade dressing, chicken grand-mère, sardine and red pepper terrine, spiced skirt steak, and more.

toes, and bordelaise sauce) ooze inventiveness. The mini essays sprinkled throughout are a nice window into Keller's seminal experiences as a chef. Cons: Reproducing restaurant quantities at home creates problems. For example, the recipe for Lemon Sabayon-Pine Nut Tart with Honeyed Mascarpone Cream will leave you with two extra crusts. This book has you constantly turning to other pages to make components such as infused oils, which are produced in quantities of ⅓ cup and then used by the table-spoon. With 200 beautiful color photos and a large-size

Natalie Danford is a New York City food writer and the author of a pasta cookbook. ♦



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### Reviews

(All books are hardcover.) **Butter Sugar Flour Eggs**, by Gale Gand, et al. Clarkson Potter,

\$32.50; 288 pp.

**Alice Medrich's Cookies & Brownies**, Warner, \$21.95; 123 pp.

**Madhur Jaffrey's World Vegetarian**, Clarkson Potter, \$40; 760 pp.

**Chez Panisse Café Cookbook**, by Alice Waters, et al., HarperCollins, \$34; 267 pp.

**The Italian Country Table**, by Lynne Rossetto Kasper. Scribner, \$35; 416 pp.

**Daniel Boulud's Café Boulud Cookbook**, with Dorie Greenspan. Scribner, \$35; 384 pp.

**The French Laundry Cookbook**, by Thomas Keller, et al. Artisan, \$50; 320 pp.

**Essentials of Cooking**, by James Peterson. Artisan, \$40; 320 pp.

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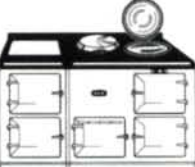
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# NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Chorizo-Stuffed Pork Loin	30	670	340	44	36	37	13	19	3	140	1010	4	per serving
Beef Tenderloin with Red Peppers	31	330	200	27	4	22	6	11	2	80	530	1	per serving
Veal Loin with Wild Mushrooms	32	410	270	23	13	30	13	13	2	120	480	2	per serving
Chicken Under a Brick	35	990	610	89	1	67	17	32	14	355	850	0	per half 3-lb. chicken
Classic Potato Gratin	36	400	300	4	23	33	21	10	1	120	280	2	1/8 recipe % cheese
Stuffed French Toast	39	250	140	5	23	16	7	5	3	70	280	1	per piece*
Apple Filling with Cider Syrup	40	470	240	7	49	26	14	8	3	100	350	2	per piece**
Lemon Filling with Blueberry Syrup	40	430	220	10	41	25	13	7	3	100	370	2	per piece**
Apricot Filling with Apricot Glaze	40	480	210	10	57	24	12	7	3	95	390	2	per piece**
Mrs. Bruner's Boston Cream Candy	44	120	45	0	21	5	2	2	0.5	10	60	0	per 1-oz. piece
Pulled Golden Molasses Taffy	45	120	10	0	28	1	0.5	0.5	0	5	60	0	per 1-oz. piece
Hot Chocolate	47	430	250	15	39	28	17	9	1	50	190	0	per serving
Marshmallows	47	40	0	1	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	per marshmallow
Chocolate Whipped Cream	48	60	50	1	2	6	4	2	0	20	5	0	per 2 Tbs.
Capellini with Shellfish & Haricots Verts	54	550	210	35	49	23	3	15	2	65	240	4	per serving
Campanelle with Sausage & Leeks	54	520	180	21	61	20	7	9	1	40	850	4	per serving
Fettuccine with Creamy Sage Sauce	55	680	450	18	40	50	31	14	2	155	450	1	per appetizer serving
Fusilli with Fresh Spinach & Ricotta	55	510	180	21	59	20	10	7	1	50	650	5	per serving
Croissants	64	250	130	4	26	14	9	4	1	50	370	1	per croissant
Toasted Hazelnut & Chocolate Marquise	69	770	610	9	42	68	39	21	4	315	100	2	per slice
Cod in Tarragon Tomato Broth	90	370	200	32	8	22	3	15	2	75	700	1	per serving

\* without filling or syrup

\*\* with 3 Tbs. filling & 2 Tbs. syrup or glaze

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

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# A Tomato-Herb Broth Keeps Cod Moist

**T**his recipe is perfect for lazy cooks. It satisfies the same cravings for comforting, flavorful food that stews do, but without the laborious chopping and long cooking that so many stews require.

The rich, meaty texture of cod is perfect for this dish. Its mild flavor takes readily to the tomato and tarragon seasoning, and I love its silky texture. But you can use any firm-fleshed fish. I've made it with halibut and sea bass, too, and I've never been disappointed.

Searing the fish first gives it a nice golden color and caramelizes some of the natural sugars, which add flavor to the finished dish. Cook the fish just long enough to give it some color before adding the broth, and then simmer it slowly until the fish is just cooked through. There's a wonderful exchange of flavors between the fish and the broth that leaves them both tasting better.

## Cod in Tarragon Tomato Broth

Chicken stock works deliciously in this dish, but you can also try a good-quality fish stock, which is often found in the frozen food section of specialty food markets. Clam juice works in a pinch. *Serves two.*

**3 Tbs. olive oil**  
**1 large shallot, finely chopped**  
**1 clove garlic, minced**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**4 plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped (canned is fine)**  
**1 Tbs. chopped fresh tarragon**  
**¼ cup dry white wine**  
**½ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken or fish stock**  
**2 cod fillets, about 6 oz. each**



**A fragrant tarragon-tomato broth gently cooks the cod and then gets ladled on top of the fish.**

In a medium saucepan, heat 2 Tbs. of the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the shallot, garlic, salt, and pepper and sauté until the shallot is softened and beginning to brown, about 5 min.

Add the tomatoes and 2 tsp. of the tarragon and continue to cook until the tomatoes begin to give off some of their juice, about 5 min. Add the wine and cook, uncovered,

over medium-high heat until reduced by half, about 7 min. Add the stock, reduce the heat to low, and let simmer while you prepare the fish.

Meanwhile, heat the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil in a nonstick frying pan over medium-high heat. Add the fish (most attractive side down) and cook until well browned, about 3 min. Turn it over and pour the tomato

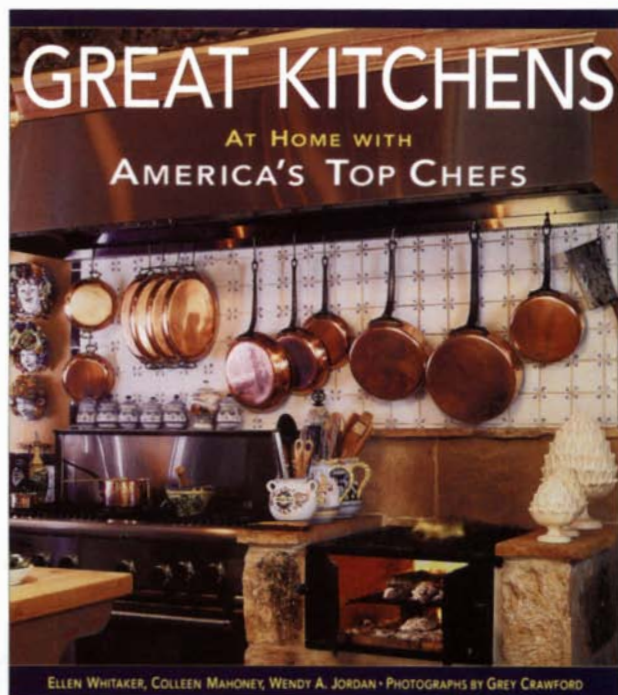
broth around the fish. Let simmer gently until the fish is cooked through, about 7 min.

Transfer the fish to soup bowls or rimmed plates and ladle the broth on top. Sprinkle with the remaining 1 tsp. tarragon and serve.

*Jan Newberry is a writer living in Oakland, California. She is the former managing editor of Fine Cooking.* ♦



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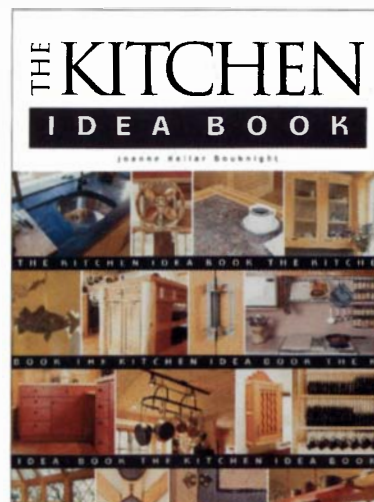
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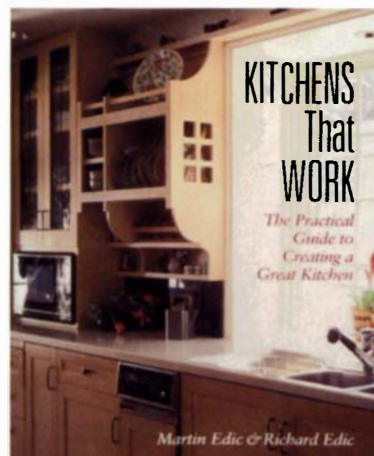
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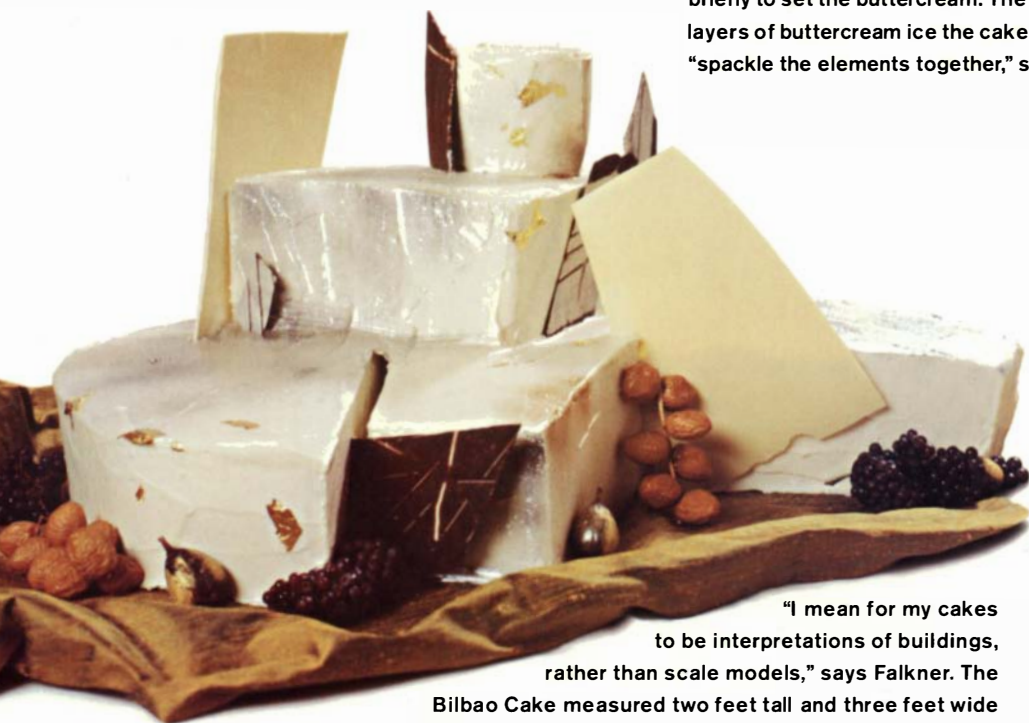


# Architecturally Inspired Cakes



Elizabeth Falkner, a San Francisco pastry chef and former filmmaker (her soon-to-open *pâtisserie* café is called Citizen Cake), gleans inspiration for many of her luscious cakes and desserts from a seemingly unlikely source: buildings. “I love rectangles, squares, and little bits of color, especially when they take on three-D forms,” says Falkner, who attributes her influences to the “whimsical, modernist architecture and its blocky, clean lines” of her native Los Angeles.

So when two artists commissioned her to make their wedding cake and requested that it resemble Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, Falkner was elated. “Cakes and architecture make total sense to me—traditional wedding cakes look exactly like Victorian or Art Deco buildings. My nontraditional cakes just use the language of modern architecture.”



“I mean for my cakes to be interpretations of buildings, rather than scale models,” says Falkner. The Bilbao Cake measured two feet tall and three feet wide at the base and was devoured by all 75 wedding guests.



All cakes start with a blueprint. Falkner bakes a basic sheet cake and then uses a cardboard template to cut the shapes. Cake scraps and trimmings never go to waste—they’re used to build up the form.



Falkner baked her After Midnight Chocolate Cake the day before. The morning that the finished cake was to be presented, she alternated the layers with a rich chocolate mousse.



A “crumb coat” of bitter almond buttercream tames stray crumbs and ensures a pristine surface; Falkner then freezes the cake briefly to set the buttercream. The following layers of buttercream ice the cake and “spackle the elements together,” she says.



To evoke the reflective component of Bilbao’s façade, Falkner blew silver dust and bits of gold leaf onto the buttercream surface.



Falkner sculpted white chocolate panels to echo and support the structure with a different medium, a different texture, and a different flavor than the cake.